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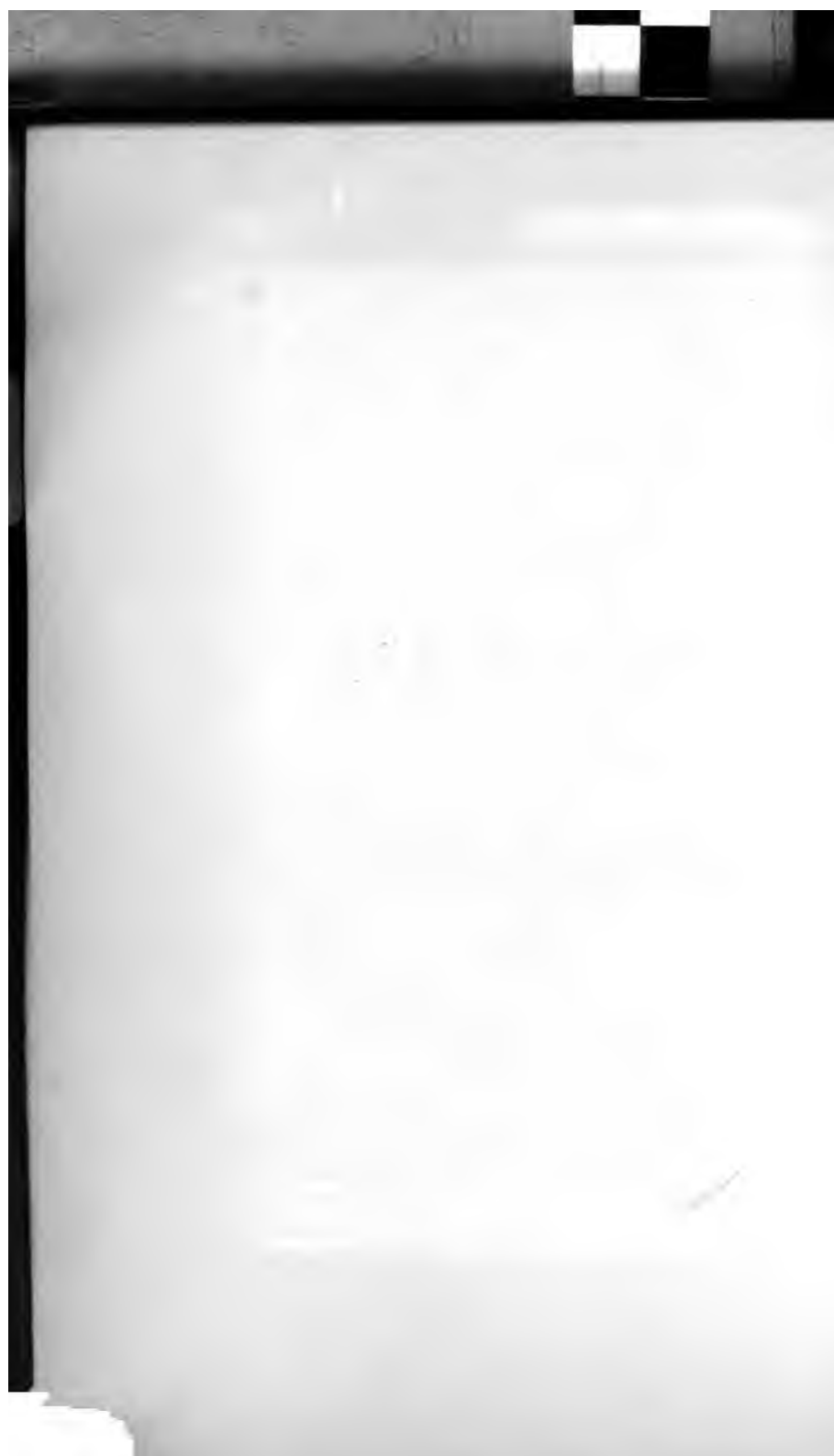


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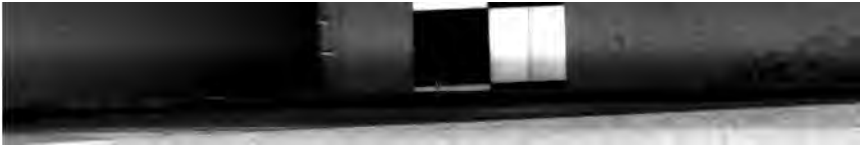






SOME MODERN HERETICS

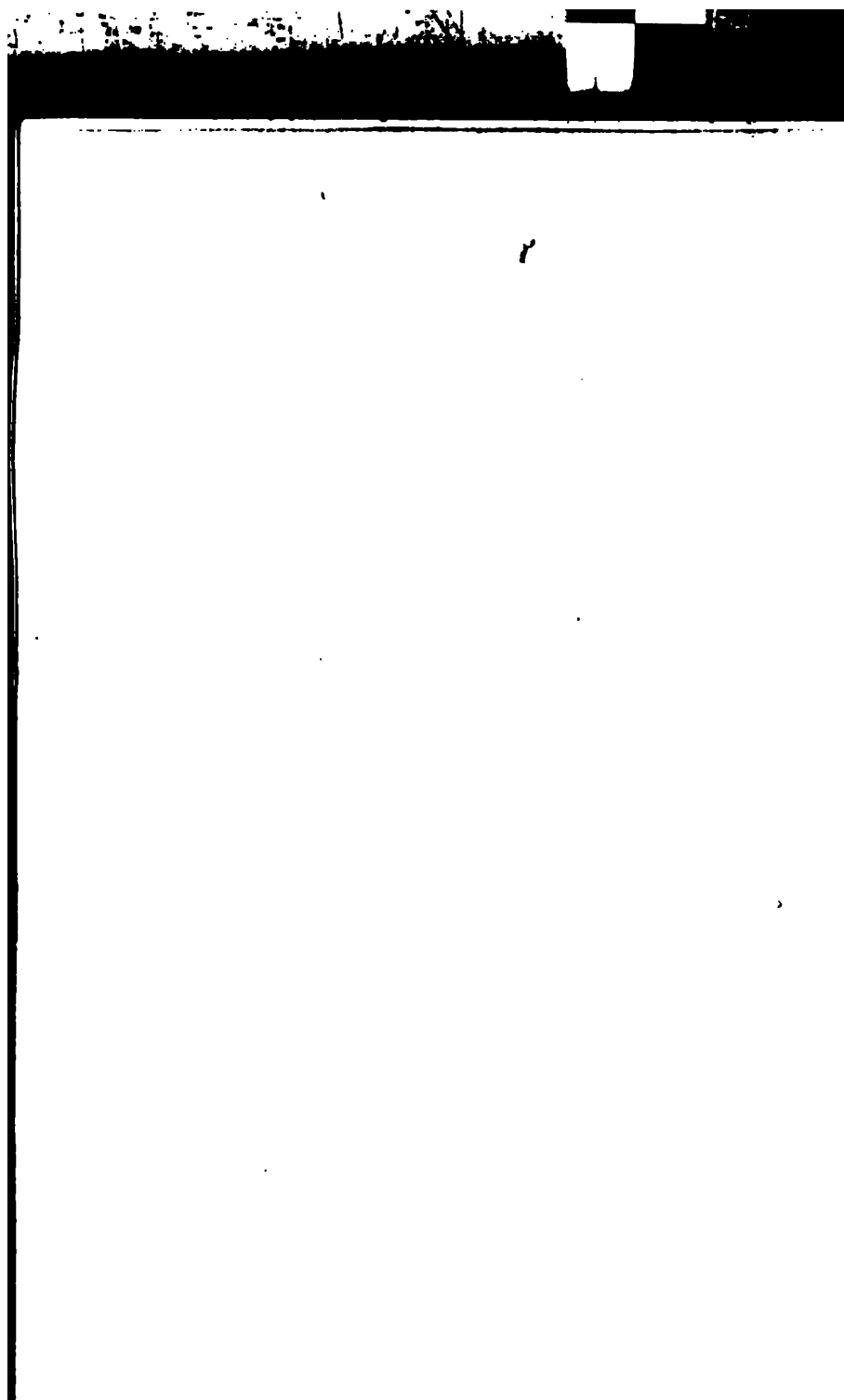




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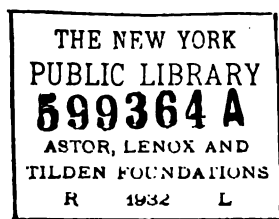
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"To that divine Self in thee, eternal and incorruptible.

"Love, walking softly by thy side, looks into thine eyes and points through the dark earth shadows to thy star, set high in the firmament of aspiration. And then thou knowest thy star, O soul, and the high path thou art born to tread, and thou makest thyself ready. Love sees all of thee that is true grow strong, all of thee that is holy set free, all of thee that is great made manifest. And Love smiles and is content."



Some Modern Heretics.

CHAPTER . I.

IN the midst of the great dusty city of New York, Central Park lay clothed in the tender verdure of early spring. It was five o'clock of a Saturday afternoon. A few of the unwashed toilers of the earth had finished their work and come out to enjoy the whiff of freshness which the Park afforded. Most of them were unrefined and rather stupid-looking persons, not at all attractive in appearance. The average observer generally turns from these humble fellow-citizens to watch the endless string of carriages rolling along the drives. If he is a person of intelligence himself, he probably wonders what pleasure or profit any sane mortal can find in joining this daily procession of blank monotony. It demands no exertion of mind or body ; it calls forth no feeling save one of languid interest in recognizing acquaintances no better employed than one's self, — an apathetic sense of slumberous motion. Taking another look at the man with unshaven face, and the girl dressed in a poor copy of some rich woman's garment, the observer may conclude that on the whole they are most to be respected, for at least they have labored and earned the right to do nothing. They have earned more, — the ability to enjoy doing nothing. Their work furnishes a sauce to the luxury of inaction.

A man standing at the side of one of the drives was watching the panorama of wealth and poverty, of elegant *ennui* and *bourgeois* enjoyment, as the *blasé* theatre-goer sits and watches a play, critical, interested, and entirely apart from it.

Two dirty little boys were standing near him, staring with open mouths at a pony wagon that was passing. They had the bright, happy faces which childhood manages to keep in all but the most discouraging circumstances. Undoubtedly they lied and swore and fought, and if they did not steal yet, they would some day. Suddenly one of them made a dash beneath the heads of two big bay horses, dodged the feet of the first to find himself under the immediate necessity of dodging the feet of the second. He was not knocked down and killed, as he should have been according to all logic of probabilities. He squirmed between the wheels of a drag, stooped and picked up something, then dashed back to his grinning companion, holding a large paper-wrapped caramel which his quick eye had seen fall from the pony wagon. "Yer kin have it, Bill," he said, offering it to the smaller boy with a gulp in his throat as he thought what a sacrifice he was making. But, colossal as was the temptation, Bill also put it from him. "Nah, take it ter Sue," he said, and into Jim's dirty pocket it went for the delectation of the little invalid girl in the tenement room called home.

"Humph!" thought the man, who had been watching this scene, "diamonds lying in the mud! Whose business is it to pick them up?"

The man, be it admitted at once, was much given to moralizing, philosophizing, theorizing. Moreover, he was always willing to accept any invitation to air his views; but the charm of his personality and manner was so great that he generally escaped the opprobrium which frivolity and egotism heap upon his kind.

He still stood by the drive and the carriages still rolled by, — carts, victorias, drags, and all the rest. He pondered a good deal about the raw material they were bearing. Now and then a sweet face, a sad face, a strong face, stood out from the rest in unique unexpectedness. What were they doing in that throng of the commonplace? On, on, rumbled the senseless procession, bearing its raree-show of minds and hearts stagnating in the display of their oil dollars, sugar dollars, railroad dollars, of their

neo-aristocratic idleness, vapidty, and high eminence. The day smiled benignly upon them, warmed them, made some of the fair girl-cheeks rosy and some of the mature fleshy ones red. Clear, beautiful, the sky vaulted the earth, its dome of blue unhidden by mist or storm-cloud. The man, looking with a sort of tolerant irony upon the animated scene before him, attracted a good deal of attention himself from such of the passers as happened to glance in his direction. Almost any one noticing him would turn to look again. Tall, well-built, his head was set on his shoulders with the easy poise of conscious strength. His fine gray eyes were alert and searching, the lines of his mouth firm without being hard. His large, well-shaped nose imparted an expression of power and harmony to his face. His forehead was broad and noble, the lower part of his face a trifle too square. He wore a mustache and short Vandyke beard a shade lighter than his dark brown hair. The hair, fine and silky, grew long enough for its soft wave to be apparent.

A stranger was always puzzled where to place this man. He bore the unmistakable stamp of a gentleman, but was very far from possessing the starched appearance of the typical man of social standing. His clothes were well made and fitted him perfectly, but had adapted themselves to the peculiarities of their wearer. The unconventional carelessness of his bearing seemed to have communicated itself to the very hang of his coat. His hat was a soft, easy piece of head covering which, luckily for him, the fashion of the day permitted.

Was he a painter, a musician, a student? Was he a foreigner of distinction travelling incognito, or merely a sort of respectable tramp? He certainly was not an ordinary, everyday individual. Everything about him marked him out from the ranks of the average, set him beyond the limits of the usual.

A victoria drawn by a spirited pair of bay horses came toward him. In it were seated two very well-dressed girls, both of whom happened to turn in his direction.

"What a handsome man!" said one, in the high, metallic voice with which so many American women are afflicted.

"Yes, handsome and very striking," answered the other, in much more harmonious tones. "He has a remarkable face."

She half turned to watch him as she passed, when he suddenly raised his eyes as though conscious of her glance. For an instant their eyes met squarely, then she turned away with a slight flush.

"She may have possibilities, but Fortune's handicapped them pretty heavily," he said to himself. Then he laid his hand on Jim's head and surprised him into a defensive stare by asking if he thought he would like a pony to ride.

Jim expressed his mingled surprise and resentment at such an unexpected and ironical query by the colloquial rejoinder, "What cher givin' us?"

"Come along, and I'll show you."

"Don't cher do it," said Bill, in what was supposed to be a whisper. "He's one er dem Sunday-school blokes what tries ter fool fellers inter havin' no fun and singin' blamed songs what don't mean nahthin'."

Jim drew away at this suggestion. "There ain't no flies on us," he said aggressively.

"Have you ever seen the horses over there that go round a ring?"

"Yer bet I have."

"Have you and Bill ever been on one?"

"Nah! Jer tink we're Wanderbilts?"

"Possibly, — in the first stages of development, so you may have innumerable real horses some day. In the mean time I'll take you to the wooden ones and let you ride them till your small heads spin off. Will you come?"

Jim and Bill exchanged questioning glances. Their experience, though wide and varied, had not prepared them for the unusual situation.

"How's we ter know yer ain't foolin' us?"

"Don't you think it's worth while coming to see in case I'm not?"

This idea struck them favorably. "Well, we's wid yer," said Jim.

"I solemnly affirm, my sceptical young friends, that I'm not fooling you; I'm easing my sensitive conscience, which is burdened by your very existence." As he spoke he started down the path with the free gait one would have expected of him. The two children followed slowly and doubtfully at first, but as he talked and joked with them they gradually gained confidence and all misgiving died out of their unbelieving little minds.

The man watched their first wild delight as they bestrode the whirling steeds of the merry-go-round. After a time he called them to him.

"Put that card in your pocket, Jim," he said. "That's my address on it. If you can't read, get some one to do it for you. I want you and Bill to come and see me. I'm going to introduce you to a friend of mine who stays on earth just to give boys lots of fun."

"If he's a kinder one like you yer can bet we'll come. Say, mister, tank yer fur de ride."

He paid the man running the merry-go-round for a dozen more rides and then strolled off.

"And the city swarms with them," he said to himself. "Eternity does n't seem long enough to get through with them."

Meanwhile the victoria with the bay horses, unmindful of either ragged children or eternity, went on its way through the Park, out along the Boulevard and then back by the River Side drive. Its fair occupants were the objects of much notice and exchanged a great many bows with a great many people. They were the daughters of Gordon Radcliffe, which circumstance alone distinguished them even in the very distinguished circles of their "set." Gordon Radcliffe was supposed to be, and for the matter of that really was, descended from English ancestors of excellent birth, and some prominence. He was moreover a successful merchant and a very rich man. His family's social

grade was therefore the very highest attainable to the soaring American spirit,—unless when, in the extreme of ambition, it vaults to foreign dizzy planes of titled loftiness. Radcliffe and his family realized fully the superiority of their own quality. They did credit to it by an exemplary and unwavering exclusiveness through which sixty-five millions of their countrymen were barred from the remotest possibility of ever being recognized as their brothers in Adam. In tracing their pedigree they stopped this side of the point where things were so disagreeably mixed up as to compel recognition of a common and universal title to the original parent.

As the victoria, bearing the daughters of the house of Radcliffe, re-entered the Park on the west side after making its ordered tour of the drives, a well-appointed tandem approached from the other direction.

“Vida,” said Mabel, the younger of the two girls, “there’s Frank Vaughn bowing to us; don’t you see him?” Mabel was the possessor of the metallic voice.

“Is he? Oh!” and Vida returned the salute of a good-looking man driving the tandem, and who seemed very anxious to attract her attention.

“Do you intend to accept him?” asked Mabel.

Vida frowned a little at her sister’s direct question. Mabel’s cool, to-the-point speeches were one of Vida’s many crosses. She said she had many.

“I don’t know,” she answered shortly.

“Well, I think you’d better. He has money, position, and blood; and he’s amiable. That’s a great consideration for a person with your temper.”

Vida’s brown eyes flashed in instant proof of her temper’s quality.

“You’d better take care of your own temper and not trouble so much about mine,” she answered with more warmth than was consistent with strict observance of either Christian meekness or conventional immobility.

“My temper’s all right. It may n’t be very sweet, but it

is n't explosive like yours ; besides, I've sense enough not to indulge it at the expense of my own comfort, and I don't let it make me do ridiculous things."

"Thank you for the insinuation," with increasing though still partially suppressed anger.

"You're getting into a white heat now. Some day you'll rush off and do something outrageous. You have n't any self-control. Though I am younger, I've a great deal more."

"Then it's a pity you don't exercise it upon your tongue. Till you do I have n't any desire for your company."

By this time Vida was thoroughly aroused or she would not have come so near justifying Mabel's prophecy on the spot. "Parker," she called to the footman, "tell Saunders to stop a moment at the side of the drive."

"For Heaven's sake, what are you going to do?" asked Mabel.

"I'm going to relieve myself of unpleasant society."

"Are you crazy? What *will* people think?"

Vida deigned no further reply, and before Parker could proffer his services, sprang to the ground with an impetuosity that life-long training in the proprieties restrained very considerably. Mabel, utterly shocked and indignant, was left to drive off again in solitary state, with a coachman and footman feigning obtuse unconsciousness of anything unusual having occurred. Then Vida realized that she had done a very awful thing. The Armstrongs and the De Forests, who were right behind their carriage, must have witnessed it, and perhaps a dozen more people whom she knew. As quickly as possible she turned down a path leading away from the drive, feeling thoroughly ashamed of herself. It was not at all a case of conscience, only one of fear of her world's criticism upon an act so entirely improper. And Mabel, whose manifestations of temper, though silent, were very unpleasant, would go home and report the proceeding in the blackest colors possible. That meant trouble with Aunt Georgiana and irritable reprimand from her father. Vida knit her brows and raised her head defiantly.

She walked on and crossed a bridge over the upper end of the big lake, then took a secluded path that led over a hill where the trees grew so thickly as to have quite a woodland effect. She had no idea that there was such a quiet, pretty place so accessible. Of course she had never walked in the Park. People didn't do it. Her mortification and ill-humor gave way slowly to a sense of pleasure at being in the green, tranquil solitude. Coming to a bench on the curve of a path overlooking the lake, she sat down and thought how delightful it was to be there.

"I'm coming often," she said to herself. "But Aunt Georgiana won't let me," was the immediate recollection. "I believe I'll marry Frank Vaughn just to get away from Aunt Georgiana." This brought the question of Frank Vaughn's proposal to her remembrance. He was coming for his answer that evening. What should it be?

"He's a gentleman, and I like him," she reflected. "Then he's rich. Of course I could n't marry a pauper or a man who had n't any ancestors. Love him?" She blushed a little as the words passed through her mind. "No, I certainly don't. I'd never care for any man in the romantic heroine's crazy way. Men don't inspire me with adoration. It would be awful, though, if I developed a talent for it when it was too late. Nonsense! As if I'd let myself do such a thing!" She drew herself up proudly. The idea of a Radcliffe ever compromising herself! It was ridiculous. "I've never had any absorbing affection for any one except — oh, mother, mother, why were you taken from me?"

She had not thought of her mother very lately; that is, not in a vivid, living way. Time had long since done its work, and in softening the pain of loss had blurred the distinctness of recollection and stopped the process of mental vitalization by which we re-create our dead, hold them for a time in our midst, and associate them with our life. The tranquillity of the scene, the caress of the gentle breeze, the thousand silent influences of the sweet spring-time increased her undefined sense of need, of

loneliness, and into her heart crept her mother's memory as it had not done for a long while. The tears came to her eyes and she let them roll down her cheeks. Her thoughts went back, back to the days when her mother's presence had been her supremest delight. She had worshipped her passionately, devoutly, with a love of which the other children had no comprehension; and the mother's heart had responded to the heart of the child with an intensity of feeling whose manifestations she would often try to suppress from a sense of justice to the others. She had been a strong, noble woman, whose ideals, enshrined in the personality of those nearest to her, had been shattered only to grow grander, more beautiful, in the sacred chamber of her own soul. She had died when Vida was a little girl of twelve. The child was old enough to feel the agony of the blow, but not old enough to have been sufficiently moulded by the mother's influence to retain its impress unimpaired when subjected to the very different guidance under which she grew up.

Vida sat quite still looking out over the lake, her heart saddened by the memory of the one great sorrow of her life. Presently she dashed the tears from her eyes with a passionate movement. "I'll marry Frank Vaughn," she said; "I'll be free; I won't have Mabel irritating me and Aunt Georgiana nagging me; and then perhaps — I'll remember the things mother used to say to me."

She started. Some one passing close by, and whose approaching footsteps she had been too absorbed to notice, roused her from her abstraction. Looking up, for the second time that afternoon, she saw the strange man who had stood by the side of the drive. He had been walking with bowed head, as lost to externals as herself. As she looked up, he did also, and once more their eyes met directly. Into the face of each came a flash of surprised recognition. Then the man passed on, his head erect, his revery broken. He walked only a few feet, till he turned the bend in the path and was hidden from her view. Here he stopped and evidently took up another line of very interesting reflection.

Vida's revery was also dispelled. She felt a definite curiosity in regard to this man, — a remarkable thing for her. Active interest in any person whose credentials she did not know and consider satisfactory was unusual with her. As she sat wondering about him, other footsteps approached. A moment later an individual, dressed in what he evidently deemed the height of *recherché* fashion, came into view. There was the swagger of vulgar assurance in his gait, an upward turn to his very black mustache, and a most unpleasant expression of impudence about his whole face. As he drew near, this expression grew into a leer which, from memory of past triumphs, he presumably thought irresistible. He stopped in front of Vida without any useless preliminaries.

"Good-afternoon, miss," he said offensively; "a prooty gal like you ought ter have some nice feller along with yer, 'stead of sittin' here alone."

Miss Radcliffe rose with something in her heart not very remote from murder. Her face flushed scarlet with indignant rage. She was too intensely angry to be frightened.

"There, yer need n't pretend mad. Jest set down again and let's have a good time."

"You impudent wretch! How dare you!"

"Come now, if yer talk that way and look so darn handsome about it —" He took her hand and bent toward her. Before she could move or cry out, the loafer was struck across the face and fell in a collapsed heap at her feet. The strange man had come to her rescue in true heroic fashion, timely and effective.

"I've a great mind to hammer the life out of you," he said, looking down dispassionately at his victim.

The discomfited rowdy scrambled promptly to his feet again, eyed the figure of threatening vengeance before him, muttered something about "not meanin' no harm," and slunk off.

"I don't know how to thank you enough," said Vida. "I never had such a horrible thing happen to me in my life." Again she blushed vividly at recollection of it.

"Unfortunately we're so uncivilized yet that our women are

not free from insult even in places where it ought to be made impossible."

"It was all my own fault; I had no right to come here. I —"

She stopped abruptly. Though he had done her an inestimable service, the man was a stranger, and she knew nothing about him. It was not necessary to be so expansive. With the fine shading possible only to a woman trained in the highest social schools, she tempered the expression of her gratitude by resuming the dignified reserve forgotten in the moment of her need and ensuing relief. "You can't doubt how very much I feel indebted to you," she said earnestly, but more formally.

"I'm very glad I was on hand. When I passed by just now I thought you seemed in some —" He hesitated, then left the sentence unfinished. "I know it's not likely, but can I be of any further service to you?" he asked.

"You're very kind; none whatever, thank you," she answered a little stiffly.

Again he hesitated. "You'll probably feel nervous at going through the Park alone, and it would be very disagreeable for you to meet this man again."

"Can you tell me, please, which is the nearest entrance?" she asked anxiously.

"The one at Eighth Avenue and Seventy-Second Street. It's not more than ten minutes' walk from here."

"And I can take a car at Eighth Avenue, can't I?"

"Yes."

"Will you be kind enough to direct me how to reach the entrance?" In spite of herself, Vida betrayed the fear she felt of that solitary walk.

"I can direct you easily, and the sign-posts will guide you, but — I'll be very glad to see you to a car if you'll allow me."

"I shall be very, very much obliged to you. I *am* nervous about going alone."

He had taken off his hat on first addressing her, and still stood with head uncovered. There was a chivalry in his

manner that seemed to place him back in mediæval history. As they went down the path together, the perfect ease and simplicity of his bearing took almost all restraint from the rather trying situation.

"I hope I've not seemed officious in my offers of assistance," he said; "I'm afraid I'm rather apt to ignore the laws of strict etiquette. It's one of my eccentricities which I sincerely beg you to pardon." An amused look sparkled in his eyes for an instant. "I had a feeling that I might be of some use to you. It was absurd in me, and I apologize for what was probably an unwarrantable liberty."

She raised her head quickly and met his eyes with an involuntary appeal in her own. What actuated her look? Was it the magnetism of the man? Was it that undefined need of her heart? Was it an intuitive perception that here was a fellow-creature who could satisfy the vague something which had been crying out for help that afternoon?

The man glanced at her more attentively than he had yet done, paused a moment, and then spoke, not carelessly, but with the off-hand, practical manner one falls into when talking to an auditor who has asked a question, but from whom one does not expect much interest or comprehension. Whatever the sequence of thought in his own mind his words had no apparent connection with anything said before.

"It's not an original subject of reflection, but it's perennially profitable, — the period in a person's life when he grows tired of toys and wants something that's real and won't break."

"I — I don't understand you."

"I'm sinning now by boring you with my philosophizing."

"You are interesting me very much indeed. Please tell me what you mean."

He was considerably surprised at the earnestness of her tone. "It's a consoling fact," he said, "that sooner or later most people get tired of groping in the dark among the superficial things of a tinsel world. When they do they're to be sincerely congratulated."

"And if one does get tired," she asked, after a moment's silence, "what does it mean?"

"That there's something in human creatures which the flesh-pots of Egypt can't satisfy."

Vida was listening with an eagerness which she did not realize. He was strangely voicing a wonderful, deep-lying secret of her own nature, — a secret that only now when clothed in words flashed upon her as a reality. Her youth and elasticity of temperament had not always been proof against the malady of fashionable languor. "There must be something more in the world, I suppose; but what is it?" she asked.

He smiled a little. "Some people, generally poor and often very ill-used people, are so foolish as to say it's ideals, principles. They dream beautiful dreams which they try more or less to put into practice, and declare they're happy. There's a car coming; shall I stop it?"

They had reached the entrance of the Park and end of the conversation. Vida thanked the man very sincerely, and took her seat in the car, wondering rather incoherently over her adventure. She did not understand her own feelings. That an utter stranger should have so affected her, should so have drawn her out of her decorous formality, was very extraordinary. She felt dimly that some hidden depths of her being had been stirred in an unusual way. In her soul sounded faintly something that seemed like the echo of her dead mother's voice, and answering it came a sense of dissatisfaction with herself.

CHAPTER II.

IT was more than dusk, it was almost dark, when Vida reached home. She had lingered in the Park much longer than she had been aware. During her ride in the car she rehearsed the incidents which had just occurred, and her mind became more and more chaotic in regard to the whole episode. Her conventionality and exclusive instincts were entirely at odds with it. She felt most uneasy at the impropriety of being out alone so late, and dreaded the reception to be met with from her family. As she was about to ring the bell, the hall door opened and her brother Julian, a youth of nineteen, came out. His straight, fine eyebrows drew disagreeably together, and he turned upon her with no very gracious air of welcome.

"Well, it's you, is it? What in Heaven's name have you been doing? Father was just sending me out to scour the city for you."

"Vida," sounded a high, thin voice from the drawing-room, "what *does* this mean?" and into the hall fluttered a small, middle-aged, richly dressed spinster with horror written all over her sharp, refined features. "*Where* have you been? Have you taken complete leave of your *senses*? Mabel told me about your *outrageous* behavior, and then never to come in till this time of night! Have you forgotten entirely that you are a *Radcliffe*?"

"No," said Vida, desperately, as her aunt paused with this supreme question for climax, — "no, I wish to goodness I could;" and she began to ascend the stairs.

Miss Georgiana Radcliffe looked after her niece in speechless dismay at the terrible utterance of such a profane sentiment.

"I'm going to dress," said Vida, from halfway up the staircase ; "I'll let Miles bring some dinner to my room."

And thus Vida found herself brought back from short-lived wandering amid new experiences and emotions into the decorous paths of the commonplace. She sighed, threw her hat on the bed, and rang for Miles, the maid. She eat very little of the dinner which she ordered, and then gave herself up to be dressed, snubbing completely Miles' wily efforts to gain information regarding the extraordinary proceedings of her young mistress. Vida's toilet finished, she stood in front of her long glass and surveyed herself. It was more from habit that she did so than from any particular desire to see herself, though she looked exceedingly well in an effective pale yellow crape gown whose fashion showed to advantage her tall and slim but well-formed figure. The large puffed sleeves only reached to the elbow, and the round whiteness of her neck was seen through the lace *gimpe* which filled in the low-cut bodice. Her head was well shaped, and she carried it like a very superior person who is quite conscious of her superiority, — an artificial bearing that took from the easy grace of its natural poise. Her complexion was rich and soft ; her features were finely cut. The mouth, warmly red and delicately moulded, was unfortunately spoiled by a slightly disdainful curl that robbed it of much natural sweetness. The brown eyes would have been beautiful if the light of feeling had been kindled in them. They were always glancing about as though they never found anything interesting enough to rest upon for long. She wore her dark hair high, parted in the middle and rolling back from her temples in soft, wavy puffs that partially covered her ears, — a style artistic and singularly becoming to her. Vida Radcliffe was undoubtedly a handsome girl, but the face that seemed formed in so many ways to express the charm of womanly loveliness was marred by the indifferent hauteur which it had assumed instead.

The front door-bell rang, and she started. It was probably Frank Vaughn who had come. She had made up her mind to accept him, fully made it up ; but now, confronted with the

necessity of acting upon the decision, she drew back shrinkingly. She did not understand or reason about it, but for a moment there was a feeling of actual repugnance at thought of carrying out her determination. She would not, could not marry him. Yet she dreaded telling him so, for, strangely enough, she thought of his feelings in the matter. Hitherto his acceptance or rejection had been considered solely from the standpoint of her own relation to the question. It had not occurred to her to have any reference to his. During the four years which she had been "out" she had refused a score of men and never been troubled by any thought of what it might mean to them. Frank Vaughn had been attentive to her for a year. In respect to the external essentials of a gentleman, he came nearer the standard of her fastidious taste than did any other man whom she knew. This had influenced her above everything else to contemplate marriage with him as a possibility.

There was a knock at her door. Miles answered it, and brought in Mr. Vaughn's card. Vida dismissed the maid, then, after a moment's hesitation, rose and went slowly downstairs. She hoped to avoid meeting any member of her family; she was in no frame of mind to encounter more of the comments which her day's performance would still call forth. But she was not to escape so easily. In the hall she met her father. He looked at her with an expression of irritable severity.

"Vida, what is the meaning of your extraordinary conduct?"

"It was an accident; I didn't have on my watch, so I could n't tell what time it was."

"Nonsense! that's no excuse! Why didn't you come home with your sister? Do you consider it a proper thing to make the public display you did, and then go wandering around the Park by yourself?"

"Mr. Vaughn is in the reception-room, papa; I've kept him waiting some time."

"I don't care who's waiting. A person of your age and with your social training should be able to control these extrava-

gant impulses. Where you get them from I'm sure I don't know. It certainly is not from *me*."

One had only to look at Radcliffe to be very sure that extravagant impulse was not one of his leading weaknesses.

"I suppose you've nothing more to say to me," remarked his daughter, coldly.

"Let such a thing *never* occur again, that's all."

When Vida entered the room where Frank Vaughn was waiting, her face was flushed and her eyes were shining with a brilliancy which misled the young man into unfortunately sanguine expectations. He was a good-looking, blue-eyed, manly fellow about twenty seven or eight years of age. He rose to meet her with unconcealed eagerness and spoke right to the point at once, simply and frankly.

"I've come as you told me. It seems a week since I left you; I never knew twenty-four such long hours in my life."

Vida sank into a chair and remained silent.

"Miss Radcliffe, Vida, what answer are you going to give me?"

Still Vida said nothing.

"Don't keep me waiting — tell me — is it yes?"

Vida clasped her hands in her lap. When she spoke her voice trembled somewhat. "Mr. Vaughn, I am sorry, believe me, I am very, very sorry —"

His face paled a little.

"Sorry! You — you — mean — What do you mean?"

"Don't make me say it; you understand."

"You mean — you mean that you — will not — marry me?"

"I cannot." Vida's voice sank to a whisper.

"Cannot! I won't believe it; I don't believe it. Why, you almost said yes, last night."

"I thought I could then."

"What possible difference is there between now and then? Vida, you've known for a long time that I love you; you will marry me?"

He suddenly took her hand, and, carrying it to his lips, kissed it passionately. She drew it quickly away and rose.

"Mr. Vaughn, stop. I'm in earnest. I cannot, I will not marry you."

He rose too. He was very white, but did not even yet seem to appreciate the meaning of her words.

"For a whole year I've dreamed of making you my wife; I've thought of nothing else." Then his voice broke. "My God, is *this* the way it's to end?"

Vida laid her hand on his arm. "Don't look so, don't!" The glow of feeling had come into her eyes, and at last she was beautiful.

He stared at her and stood a moment spellbound, then turned away.

"I—I suppose you can't help it, but you might have let me know sooner. You need n't have let me go on thinking you could care for me."

Vida's face flushed. "I never did that, never. You've no right to say such a thing."

"You saw that I worshipped you, and—you never made me think you did n't want it."

Vida's eyes fell, and she was silent.

"I suppose it did n't make any difference what *I* might feel—"

"Oh, stop, stop! I did n't know what I was doing. I've been careless, selfish, when men have admired me. But truly I've never believed much in what they call their love. Perhaps it's a real thing sometimes. As to myself, I don't think I've any heart at all, I don't believe much in anybody or anything—" She broke off abruptly. "Oh, I can't bear this. It hurts you, but it hurts me too."

The tears gathered in her eyes and rolled slowly down her cheeks. The next instant Vaughn had thrown himself on his knees and clasped his arms about her.

"Vida, Vida, you will be mine? There's nothing in the world I won't give you, I won't do for you. And by-and-

by you will love me ; you must. I'll make you ; you can't help it."

" Mr. Vaughn, let me go."

" Not till you 've said yes, not till you 've promised. Vida, I'll go mad if you won't say yes."

She looked down into the passionate, pleading, handsome face. The force of his feeling was asserting sway over her. Surely, surely it were a cruel, a wicked thing to repulse this man who was praying as though for his very life. The words of consent hung on her lips almost spoken, when suddenly to her inward vision arose as distinct as reality the form and features of the man she had met in the Park a few hours before, for the first time in her life. A great horror of what she was about to do seized upon her. There was no reason in it ; it was only an irresistible emotion. She *could* not marry Frank Vaughn.

" Mr. Vaughn," she said, in a quick, broken voice, " I've answered you, — it — it is not possible ; I cannot do it. Please go."

For an instant longer he tried to hold her ; but she broke from him, and he rose and stood before her. As long as she lived Vida never forgot the look on his face. It was as though the whole face had been frozen into a bewildered, hopeless, death-like stare. Slowly he turned from her, and without a word walked from the room. She heard him take his hat and coat, heard the hall door open and then close after him. Shuddering, she pressed her hands to her eyes. Some one came down the hall. In a moment Mabel entered the room. She stopped, struck by Vida's strange expression.

" Was that Frank Vaughn ?" She spoke merely from a nervous desire to say something. Vida was gazing at her so queerly.

" Yes."

" He did n't stay long."

" No."

" You have n't refused him ?"

" Did you come to cross-examine me ?"

The spell was broken. Vida's ordinary self had reappeared. Mabel sat down in an easy-chair and laughed sarcastically.

"Dear, no; it's your business, not mine. But for mercy's sake, will you tell me one thing? I confess to a devouring curiosity about it. What were you doing in the Park so long?"

"I was thinking."

"You might have done *that* just as well at home, and it would certainly have been more — more respectable."

"Mabel," Vida spoke with unmistakable decision, "I don't intend to hear anything from *you* on the subject —"

"There, now, don't fly out again. Perhaps you won't object if I tell you that when I got home I found an invitation for both of us from Mrs. Delafield — to a theatre party Thursday evening. Julian's invited too. It's to see the new play at the Cosmopolitan."

"I don't care to go."

"Why don't you? It's something to do. Life's so horribly dull at this halfway season, anything's a godsend. What's the matter with you, Vida?"

"Nothing's the matter with me. Oh, well, I'll go, then. Was n't that the door-bell?"

"Yes, I think so."

"I'm tired; I can't sit here and make inane conversation for two hours. You can excuse me if anybody asks for me."

Vida hurried from the room as the butler passed to answer the bell, ran quickly upstairs, and, reaching her own room, locked the door after her. At last she was alone.

It is a strange, mysterious moment in the history of a human soul when it first awakens from its torpor and begins consciously to live. Hitherto it has been carried along by the tide of other lives. It has known no personal responsibility, felt no keen sense of strong individuality that personal responsibility brings with it. It has been upheld by the strength of others, directed by the will of others, or when unchecked by authority, has been guided by unreasoning impulse. It has had no realization of

its own power and weakness, its own self-hood, and at the same time of its own connection with the great universe outside the small circle of those who have dominated its being. The awakening is generally a shock. The dazed soul stands wondering, confused at the uncomprehended birth of its dawning consciousness.

Vida stood in the middle of her room. She saw her reflection in the cheval glass, but stared at it unheedingly. Looking back at this day, she knew that it marked the opening of a new era in her life, of a period from which dated a conscious self-existence. Now all was doubt, ignorance, pain. She no longer understood herself, and despised herself. The pride, the arrogance of beauty, station, wealth, for the time were silent. She was shamed by a sense of her own unworthiness. She was haunted by the look on Vaughn's white face, reproached and yet strangely thrilled by the recollection of the light in the gray eyes that had gazed down at her in the Park, of the strange words heard from those unknown lips.

Some one turned the handle of her door to come in.

"Vida," said her aunt's voice, "open the door; I want to speak to you."

She set her mouth in a firm line and drew herself up proudly, as she always did when meeting opposition or reproof. She unlocked the door, and Miss Radcliffe entered.

"Vida," she began in a peculiarly irritating tone and manner, habitual to her reprimands, — "Vida, though you should have passed the age when such a thing is necessary, I feel *obliged* to come and tell you how *extremely* deplorable your day's exploit has been."

Miss Radcliffe was always prone to emphasis. On such occasions as the present she was lavish with it.

"I don't think, Aunt Georgiana, such a thing is at all necessary now. I *have* passed the age for it."

"Mabel tells me *everybody* saw the performance. And of course the servants will tell *everybody* else that you never got home till *nearly eight* o'clock. *Anything* can be made of it

They can say you had a *rendezvous* in the Park with some *man*. They can — ”

“How dare you, Aunt Georgiana ?”

“Do you realize, miss, to *whom* you are speaking ?”

“Yes ; and do you realize that you are going entirely too far ?” The girl was very white and trembling with indignant anger.

“After your conduct of to-day I ’m not surprised at *anything* you may *do* or *say*. I suppose it ’s from your *mother’s* side you get these — these *unfortunate* tendencies. She never *did* control them in you as she *should*.”

Then the girl’s eyes blazed. “If you were even a little bit like my mother, I should be a much better girl than I am. That you, *you* should dare say anything against *her* ! *Never do it again* ! ”

“After the years I ’ve sacrificed to you, the trouble I ’ve had with you, more than with all the rest of the children together ! I order you to be silent ; don’t speak another word to me.”

“I will speak another word to you, Aunt Georgiana. Whatever you ’ve done for me, you ’ve had an equivalent for it. My father’s house has been your house ; everything in it has been at your disposal. As to the bringing up you ’ve given me, I ’ve very little to thank you for. What would my mother say if she could see what I ’ve become, — how utterly useless and selfish I am ? I know ; I understand. I had a little good in me when she died ; I have n’t any now. Most of it has been your work, Aunt Georgiana. But I ’m twenty-three years old ; you have absolutely no authority over me now, — you have absolutely no right to speak to me as you ’ve done. I will not allow it. I ’ve borne this kind of thing as long as I intend to.”

Miss Radcliffe looked at her niece in mute amazement. Her face was as white as Vida’s. “In all my life no one has ever dared *insult* me before. Your father perhaps can face your *violence* and your *rudeness*.” And she left the room in a tempest of feeling that for once swept away the little spinster’s satisfied self-importance.

While Vida still stood where her aunt had left her, her father appeared on the scene. His daughter turned to him with a steely look in her flashing eyes and about her lips.

"You behaved disgracefully this afternoon before a thousand people, you behaved disgracefully in staying out till most improper hours, and now you behave disgracefully to your aunt because she reproves you as you deserve. What do you mean by it?"

"I mean that I'm tired of being treated like a child, and tired of this endless quarrelling and fault-finding. I mean that I'll do anything in this world to get away from it."

"If your home is so very distasteful, why don't you marry and leave it? You're quite old enough to. You're a self-willed, bad-tempered girl. While you do stay in my house, I shall compel you to treat your aunt with respect, and to obey her and me implicitly. You've made a perfectly scandalous disturbance in the house."

"Then let me go and live somewhere else if I'm such a disgrace to you. Let me go and live at Aunt Emily's. She'll be glad to take me if you pay her something."

"Rubbish! You'll learn to conduct yourself properly in the place where you belong. Your wild ideas are most nonsensical. I've come to say that this sort of thing must stop *at once*. I simply will not permit it."

Vida bit her lip to keep back the torrent of passion that was raging in her breast. Her father went out.

"If there were anything in the world I could do to earn a few miserable dollars to live on, I'd leave this house to-night," she cried, throwing herself onto her lounge and bursting into a flood of bitter, tempestuous tears. An hour later she sat down to her desk and wrote to Frank Vaughn.

"DEAR MR. VAUGHN, — My letter will surprise you. I do not know what you will think of it. In what I am going to say I shall tell you the exact truth.

"I refused to marry you to-night. You asked me to, even

if I did not love you. You thought I would learn to. I do not believe I ever can love in the way most women love. You see I am perfectly true with you. But it is true also that I like you very much. I feel now that I could be happy with you, and I honestly want your happiness. I am not so heartless as you have a right to consider. If you still think that what I can give you is enough, I will give it gladly and try my best to be worthy of such love as yours. Mr. Vaughn, to-night you made me think of you as I had never done before.

"Yours very sincerely,

"VIDA RADCLIFFE."

She posted the letter herself early the next morning, but it was many, many weeks before Frank Vaughn's eager eyes read it. When it reached his rooms he was steaming past Sandy Hook on board the "Campania," trying, as so many others have vainly tried, to leave behind him the pain in mind and heart as he left the fading outlines of the great, far-spreading city. He gave no directions for forwarding his mail, only sending back an address after landing. Then, having knocked aimlessly about London for a week, finding the old acquaintances and amusements unsatisfying, wearisome, fruitless of enjoyment, unproductive of forgetfulness, he tried Paris. The glitter and flash, the beauty and seductions of the French capital, hitherto so alluring, failed entirely to dull that insistent, gnawing memory in his brain. He joined a couple of friends on a trip to Norway and Sweden. They sought the least frequented, most inaccessible points, and roughed it for nearly two months. When they returned to more inhabited localities, Frank was taken with a low fever. While he lay for three or four weeks indifferently awaiting life or death, with a leaning toward the latter, Vida's letter, which at last had overtaken him, remained unopened among a huge pile of accumulated mail. It was past the middle of August by the time he was able to read it, when, with burning anxiety as to the results of his delayed answer, he hurried back to America as impetuously as he had hurried away.

CHAPTER III.

WINFRED GREY was lying at full length on his lounge whistling softly. It was a time and occasion when most men would have been smoking. He never smoked. He considered it an offensive habit, which made one unfit for human society. His friends thought some of his ideas fantastic. That he had never been intoxicated in his life was a virtue open to criticism in the opinion of certain convivial male persons. He drank on occasions, and had sometimes been vinously exhilarated, though not often. His moderation was partly due to principle and innate refinement, but quite as much to the fact that he hated being under any influence that weakened his own power of will.

The night was exceptionally chilly for the time of year, enough so to furnish an excuse for the fire that was burning brightly on the hearth. He had a sentimental weakness for a fire. He liked to look at it, liked the lights and shadows which the soft, blazing coal cast about the room. The poetry lurking in the glowing embers and wavering flames soothed his senses and stimulated his fancy.

The room was a back one at the top of a wide, old-fashioned, three-storied brick house in one of the streets below Fourteenth. He disliked the intrusion of outside noise into his private sanctum, and always selected his quarters with a view to absence of disturbing elements. The apartments he now occupied — the large room used as a study and the adjoining hall bedroom — were very pleasant, tastefully and comfortably furnished. The walls were nearly covered by well-stocked book-shelves with good pictures and sketches filling in the spaces. Bestrewing the

mantel-piece, cabinets, and tables, were signed photographs of celebrities, great and small, the histrionic profession being perhaps the most conspicuously represented. A large desk in one corner was littered with papers and manuscripts, and there were proof-sheets stuck in jars, lying about the tables and even on the floor.

After a while Winfred stopped whistling and his face gradually assumed a serious thoughtfulness. He let one hand fall on the head of a white deer-hound asleep on the rug beside him. Presently the front door-bell rang, and a strange smile, with more sarcasm than mirth in it, crossed his lips.

He sat up, leaned his arms on his knees, and apostrophized the dog. "Siegfried, there are some unconvicted scoundrels in the world it's every honest man's duty to kick. I'm going to kick one now, — metaphorically, not literally; I'd like it to be both."

A knock sounded at the door.

"Come in," said Winfred.

The door opened, and a girl of about fifteen entered. She might have been taken for several years younger, she was so small. The first impression she produced seemed to be made up entirely of eyes. Her eyes were all that one saw. They were of a peculiar greenish-brown with amber lights in them. They were very large, very wide open, and had a searching, questioning gaze that was a species of softened stare. Her features were irregular and plain; her complexion was absolutely colorless. Above the strange eyes rose a forehead wide, square, and high, over the sides of which her golden hair fell to the shoulders in a mass of curling waves. Her hair and eyes were her chief, her only beauties.

"He's come," she said, going up to Winfred.

"Very well, Peggy; I'll be right down."

"I wish I could go with you."

"Why?"

"I want to watch you."

"I'm afraid it won't do, my dear. I'm sorry to interfere

with your study of human nature, but our interview won't be a pleasant one."

"That's just it. It'd show *things* in both of you. I only wanted to sit back out of the way and watch you, but it does n't matter. I'll stay with Sieg instead."

She sat down on the rug near the dog.

"If you like, Peggy," said Winfred, as he was going, "you can tidy up the place for me."

"Very well; I will."

"Don't mix the manuscript on the floor with what's on the desk. I want to keep the two parts separate."

"I *suppose* I'd have known that."

"Excuse me, my dear; I did n't mean any slur on your intelligence."

Peggy did not answer except by a glance of dignified reproach. When he was almost out of the room she sprang up. "Mr. Grey," she cried, "I want to tell you something before I forget it."

He came back to listen.

"That man, Richard Paton, — you know, — well, he was here again to-day and brought his play back. He's dreadfully persistent. I told him you can't read people's plays; you have n't time to write your own. I told him you get a dozen a day, and they're all put in a box and left there. But he did go on so. He simply would leave it. So it's in there with the rest," pointing to a carved oak chest. "I do my best with these people, but I can't protect you from them as I should like to." The mature sedateness of the singular child was almost weird.

"Just think then, Peggy, what would become of me if you did n't protect me! Poor devils, I must give them a morning if I can get time. I may find a pearl among the trash." He went out, shutting the door after him. He stopped in the sitting-room on the next floor. The room was occupied by a sweet-faced woman of middle age, dressed in black, and a little boy of ten or eleven.

"Oh, Mr. Grey," said the lady, nervously, as he entered, "I hope there won't be any trouble, and I — I'd rather not see him unless it's necessary. It would be very painful."

"It won't be necessary. He'll not have the least desire to see you after I get through with him."

"There won't be any — any scene? He's a man of irritable temper."

"No; I'm sure there won't be any such scene as you fear."

"If I were a man, I'd knock him down," said the boy.

"Hush, Willie, you must n't speak so," reproved his mother.

"Yes, I would, 'cause Peggy says he's a turtle."

"A turtle?" asked Winfred, with amusement.

"Yes; that means he's got a shell of badness all over him, and he's got to be banged round and hammered till it gets broken."

"Peggy is a deep philosopher. I wish I were backed up by this young man's high moral inspiration, and there might be some turtle-breaking here to-night." He doubled up a strong, shapely hand and dealt a blow into space with a vigor that would have portended much ill to any intervening obstacle. He went downstairs into the parlor.

A gray-haired man with side whiskers was seated on the sofa, — no less important a person than Gordon Radcliffe, Esq.

"Good-evening, Mr. Radcliffe," said Winfred. "As you don't know me, I'll introduce myself. My name's Winfred Grey."

The name meant nothing to Radcliffe. Literature and the followers thereof were not in his line. He bowed with frigid condescension. "I've called to see Mrs. Dinsmore. I presume she'll be here shortly."

"Mrs. Dinsmore has asked me to see you in her place."

"Asked you to see me? My business is of an entirely private nature. There must be some mistake. If she's indisposed, I'll call again."

"There's no mistake, and Mrs. Dinsmore is perfectly well."

I'm thoroughly acquainted with the business you've come on, and I'm here to save Mrs. Dinsmore the unpleasantness of saying what I'm deputed to tell you. I may possibly add something of my own also."

"What are you talking about? Explain yourself, if you please."

"That's what I propose doing very fully. Mrs. Dinsmore declines to invest her property as you desire."

The blood rushed to Radcliffe's face, and he frowned angrily.

"Will you inform me who you are, what you have to do with Mrs. Dinsmore's affairs, how you come to know so much about them?"

Winfred had taken a seat, and while he spoke kept his eyes on Radcliffe's with a fixedness obviously disturbing to the prosperous financier.

"I've occupied rooms in Mrs. Dinsmore's house for three years. I've formed a strong friendship for her and her family, and have been able to do her some service. She has sufficient proof of my regard to ask my advice when she needs it, and has informed me minutely of her circumstances and the disposal of her property."

"Another woman who can't hold her tongue! And you've taken advantage of her garrulousness to pry into her affairs?"

"The speech is only what might be expected of you. I ignore it as I ignore other impertinences too contemptible to notice."

Radcliffe glared and bridled. He was not used to such contumaciously plain language. The shock of Winfred's audacity staggered him for a moment. He had recourse to pompous bluster.

"You're so well informed as to Mrs. Dinsmore's affairs you must know that since her husband's death, three years ago, she and I have been joint trustees of her property?"

"Certainly."

"Then, sir, what the devil have you to do with advising her?"

"Everything, when I see the man who is in honor bound to make her interests his first consideration untrue to his trust."

"Damn you ! what do you mean ?"

"I mean that you're pressed for ready money to bolster up an enterprise that's rotten to the core. If it should pull through, so much the better ; if it should n't, you'll have time to get out of it with your own greenback skin unscratched. And so you advise a widow whose husband was your friend, and trusted his wife and children in your care, to sell some of the safest and best stock in the market, mortgage her house, and put her little all into the wild-cat scheme of a nearly bankrupt company. I've had facilities for investigating your enterprise very thoroughly, and I've not neglected them. That's what I mean."

Radcliffe sprang to his feet, livid with rage. Anger choked his voice, and he could not speak distinctly.

"You're an infernal liar," he cried hoarsely.

"Most men would knock you down for that. I don't care to soil my hands with you. I've told you the truth, but you've lied to yourself. Sometimes naked truth's an ugly thing to look at. This is an exceptionally ugly truth, so you've not looked at it. You've been wonderfully clever at deceiving yourself. You've told yourself that you'll make this woman rich ; where she now gets an income of hundreds, she'll get thousands. Force the success of this scheme, and Mrs. Dinsmore will be benefited in common with yourself, more than yourself, you'll see to that. And you've put your conscience to sleep, if you still have any, with such soothing fictions, while you *know* that woman, if she did as you tell her, would probably never see one dollar of her money again. It would n't be a theft ; you could n't be sent to jail for it. You're an honest man, a humane man ; that is, you pose as one. But you've set up before yourself a golden idol ; its glitter blazes in your eyes, and lust of its possession has blinded you to the eternal fact that greed and humanity don't hang together."

"Damn you ! do you know whom you're talking to ?"

"Oh, yes, very fully, — to Gordon Radcliffe, the millionaire,

to Gordon Radcliffe, flattered by sycophants, toadied to by money-worshippers ; to Gordon Radcliffe, grown rich by screwing down women to the least pittance they can be forced to accept for the wearing out of body and soul, grown rich through the toil of men gaunt hunger compels to labor for his pleasures and luxuries. Yes, Gordon Radcliffe ; I know who you are."

Winfred had risen while he spoke. The steady flow of his words held Radcliffe silent, his face distorted by a fury he seemed incapable or fearful of expressing ; and yet he was not a weak man. Others before him had found something in Winfred's personality very difficult to combat. This man represented to Winfred everything he hated and opposed with all his power of brain and heart, — arrogant assumption, shameless cupidity, and unfeeling persistence in gratifying it. Mrs. Dinsmore's case stirred her advocate to such a storm of righteous indignation as swept him on to full, free vent of the scorn and anger rising higher within him every moment. Perhaps he transcended the limits of propriety, of warrantable attack, but he was never hampered by dread of adverse criticism upon his conduct or opinions, and always exercised a boundless capacity for doing as he pleased.

"For a long time I've looked for a chance to speak my mind to one of your species. You've given it to me when I happen to be in a voluble mood."

"Get out of my way ; let me pass."

Winfred only moved to place himself in front of the open doorway and still more effectually bar the exit.

"For once I'm going to express my somewhat vulgar sentiments face to face with a representative of that community of money-getters who are dragging the world into the horrors of brutal revolt. It'll do no good, but it's exhilarating to force one of you to look just a moment down the future and contemplate the noble part you're taking in shaping its coming events. If you're wise, you'll go out of here to-night and be a warning mouth-piece to your worthy *confrères* in the work."

An exasperating carelessness of manner covered his drastic underlying scorn.

"As the world judges honesty, you're an honest man, Gordon Radcliffe. As your friends count charity, you're a charitable man. You discharge your business obligations carefully, — it's politic. You're strictly truthful according to the elastic code barter has compiled for its convenience. You give money to missionary societies; you subscribe money to homes, to schools, to asylums. It looks well, and gives you prestige. Of course you must be an honest man, a charitable man. To take advantage of that person's incapacity, of this one's ignorance or misfortune, is legitimate shrewdness. To buy women's labor for wages which leave them to starve or supply their necessities by the one other means possible, is thrifty. What have you to do with the treasure of their womanhood's purity? Your own daughters are unspotted, and that's all you need care about. What have you and your kind to do with the starving women, the starving children, the starving men, that the pitiless grip of your moneyed strength, of your impregnable monopolies, is holding down under the heel of a hopeless misery? Yes; they're ignorant, brutal wretches. Are *you* with your wealth, your education, your advantages, with your virtues, your *honesty* and *charity*, doing anything to make them better?"

The carelessness began to give place to direct and lashing sternness.

"You help support hospitals where their wasted bodies are sent to be patched up after you get through with them; you endow orphan asylums for the children of parents you work to death. It's a compromise with Providence which leaves you entirely resigned to the necessity for hospitals and asylums, complacently oblivious that you're responsible for the necessity. You've made money the world's king, and it rules with the pitiless hand of a despot. Money, money, money, cries the fiend of self you've pampered and gluttoned; and money, money, money, groan the white lips of hunger and cold. Might is right; your pile grows bigger, and those miserable things in human shape groan on and curse God that they live.

"Gordon Radcliffe, it's a terrible thing to have no money.

The fear of poverty makes men gamblers, cheats, thieves; drags women down to sin and shame and death. And yet there's wealth enough, food enough, clothing enough, land enough on the earth for all. Why is it that the many starve and the few are surfeited? Why, why? That question is being muttered from land to land like thunder, yet far off and indistinct. Some day the storm is going to break. If you want to oppose a power to its fearful havoc, you'd better be quick; there's not much time to spare. Drag money down from the throne you've set it on, and acknowledge Justice, the only monarch ever crowned by divine right, the sole ruler over man."

He had forgotten his companion in a sweep of thought over the vast panorama of a world's life. He was no longer attacking the individual; he was attacking conditions. His voice rang out in clear, vibrating tones. Were he addressing a multitude he would have held them as one listener, dumb and silent. Radcliffe's subdued quiescence was a striking testimony to the eloquence and extraordinary personal dominion of his self-constituted judge. As he ceased speaking, Radcliffe made a step toward the door. "I'll have you locked up as a maniac," he muttered, trying to push past him.

But Winfred had not quite done with him, though his passion had partly expended itself, and he took a quieter key. "Perhaps I haven't sufficiently considered the excuse of birth and training that's to be offered for your colossal self-seeking. So far as I've forgotten it I'm wrong, but it takes a colossal charity to cover your sins. If you knew enough, you'd thank me from the bottom of your crippled soul for saving you from this last hideous crime." Then suddenly his whole manner changed, an impulse of ironic humor coming over him. "I didn't know I had so much to say to you. I've no doubt I'm one of those persons who like to hear themselves talk, and you were truly inspiring. But I've finished now. It's your turn. What have you to say? Nothing? Then, as I imagine you've heard enough from me, — good-evening."

He moved aside. Radcliffe cast a glance of fierce hatred at him. "You damned anarchist!" he hissed, "I'll make you pay for this if it takes twenty years and a million dollars."

Winfred bowed. "I shall patiently await the event."

Radcliffe walked out of the room with a dark scowl on his face. Winfred followed him into the hall, opened the door, and stood watching him as he went down the stone steps. Then he closed the door after him. He had spoken his mind, uttered his protest against the tyrants of society, and made an implacable enemy for life. What had he or the cause he advocated gained by it?

"All useless expenditure of force is immoral. Power misapplied is as prime a generator of evil as power viciously applied." The sentence was from one of his own books.

CHAPTER IV.

THE Radcliffes were dining. The occasion did not seem a joyous one. A sullen, brooding spirit exhaled from the family individually and collectively. Radcliffe sat at the foot of the table in a stony silence which was only broken now and then by an order to one of the servants. Radcliffe had his good moments, but they only occurred when everything was going his own way, when nobody was contradicting him or criticising him or taking anything he wanted himself. Since his experience with Winfred Grey he had been a person to avoid studiously. Julian divided his attention between his plate and shirt-collar, over the top of which latter he grimaced and scowled angrily as he pulled at it and twisted his neck about without apparent alleviation of the discomfort which the article caused him. Mabel had an altercation with Clara (the youngest of the house of Radcliffe) in regard to the appropriation by that young lady of some of Mabel's personal property. Aunt Georgiana felt draughts blowing down her back, and ordered shawls brought and doors closed off and on during dinner. Vida was almost as silent as her father. She looked tired and supremely indifferent. The butler and assisting footman were very decorous and very solemn. The whole situation once more brought forcibly to mind Solomon's invaluable observation concerning the stalled ox and the dinner of herbs.

Finally dessert was served, and the mute-like butler and footman withdrew. Then Radcliffe spoke.

"I've decided not to go to Newport this year."

If Radcliffe had been of a dramatic turn of mind, he could not have calculated a more startling effect, a more disagreeable sensation, than he now produced.

"Not go to Newport!" The echo of his words came in various keys, but with one uniform cadence of astonishment and dismay. Vida alone uttered no exclamation. She only looked up with a surprised expression.

"I've rented our house and taken a cottage at Red Rock on the coast of Massachusetts."

"Why, Gordon, what *do* you mean? I've made all the arrangements to go to Newport as usual," piped Miss Georgiana, in consternation.

"I'm sorry, Georgiana; you'll have to unmake them."

"I've planned all kinds of things with the girls, and I've decided on all my summer dresses," said Mabel, in equal distress.

"Confound it, father! you're not serious. I've as good as bought a new polo pony, and I've ordered another drag. Coast of Massachusetts! You don't suppose a fellow's going to vegetate all summer!" Julian got red in the face with angry excitement at the thought.

Clara uttered her protest by stating a flat refusal to obey the parental dictate. Vida still looked surprised, but expressed no opinion or desire.

"You can countermand the drag, and you need n't buy the pony," said Radcliffe to his son. "And you, Mabel, won't require new dresses for Red Rock. Last summer's will do."

"Countermand the drag!" "Last summer's!" spoke in concert the offspring to whom Radcliffe had specifically addressed himself.

"You'd better all understand at once that I intend to curtail expenses."

"Gracious me, Gordon, what *has* happened? Are we — are we *ruined*?" Poor little Miss Georgiana looked as horror-stricken as though she had asked: Has the earth gotten out of its orbit? Is the planet tearing to destruction?

"No, we're not ruined; but God knows when we shall be with this extravagant establishment."

"Why, Gordon, — why, you — you *never* said anything

about extravagance before. I'm sure I'm — I'm quite *upset*. I don't understand."

"I intend to sell all but one pair of hacks and a couple of saddle-horses. You must discharge some of the servants, Georgiana. At Red Rock we sha'n't need the retinue we have. And there are to be no enormous dressmakers' bills. Julian, your allowance will be stopped for the present. You'll not need it while you're out of town."

Radcliffe delivered himself of these announcements in a terse, sharp voice. Naturally he spoke in jerks, without much modulation of tone. His words always had a dry, clear-cut sound to them. Mabel's manner of speech was not unlike her father's. A chorus of remonstrance and discontent broke out as he ceased speaking. He listened to it a moment, then the frown on his brow deepened, he compressed his lips into a thin line, and his jaw stiffened ominously.

"Silence!" he cried, glaring at his recalcitrant household.

Radcliffe's methods of discipline, tending strongly to the tyrannical, were not productive of instantaneous obedience. The full-toned protest merely subsided into a sullen murmur.

"You're an ungrateful, selfish, disrespectful brood. Understand now, you go to Red Rock one week from to-day, and you stay there six months at any rate, and as much longer as I find desirable. Whether you like it or not does n't make the slightest difference. I'm not on the eve of bankruptcy; and as I've no wish for the world to imagine it, you'll say Clara's health requires her to be taken to the country and kept quiet for some time. You understand?"

"That'll be a big fib. It does n't require it at all," muttered Miss Clara, sulkily.

Excessive candy-eating and far too late hours for a girl of her age had imparted to that young person a sallowness of tint which might easily serve as a proper excuse for Radcliffe's changed plans.

"Leave the room, miss!" said her father, "and don't come down again to-night."

She got up petulantly, flounced across the room, and as she reached the door jerked her head in defiance. "All the same, it is a fib," she said aggressively. In the character of the family's youngest, she enjoyed rather wider privileges than her brother and sisters in the matter of repartee, — a fact of which she took ample advantage. But occasionally it so happened that she made a miscalculation and overstepped the limits allowed. Then she got into very considerable trouble.

"Go to bed, and stay there till to-morrow night," thundered the exasperated parent. Radcliffe pushed his chair back from the table and rose. "That's all I've got to say for the present," he concluded, while at the same moment the butler came in and announced that the carriage was at the door.

"Who's going out, and where are you going?" asked Radcliffe.

"Vida, Mabel, and I are going to a confounded theatre party of the Delafields," said Julian. "Much fun there'll be in it with this thing in prospect! I'd rather go and hang myself."

"Well, do so," said his father. "You'll save yourself and me a great deal of trouble."

"Mabel," said Vida, who during all the altercation had remained silent, "it's late; we'd better hurry;" and the two girls left the room to put on their hats and wraps.

But Vida did not hurry very much when she got upstairs. "What a pleasant family we are," she said to herself bitterly, "and what a pleasant thing life is! One inane round of tiresome *amusements* varied by this kind of thing. I'd like to know how a person could live for ideals and principles in such a house. Oh, how wearisome everything is! how I hate it all! how I hate —"

"Vida, are you ever coming?" asked Mabel, impatiently, putting her head in at the door. "Well, I must say! You have n't even begun to get ready. I think it's a shame in you. You always keep everybody waiting."

Fortunately Julian was as dilatory as Vida, and did not get down till a moment after her, otherwise there would have been

much additional recrimination. The young man was in a very bad humor indeed.

"This is a sweet thing!" he said, as soon as he and his sisters were seated in the carriage. "It's an infernal shame, and I won't stand it; that's all. I won't go to that hole, and I'll tell father so in plain language!"

"Perhaps you won't find it very easy to go anywhere else, as he's stopped your allowance," said Vida.

"Damn it! I'll — I'll —"

"Please reserve your swearing till some other time," said Mabel, sharply. "Vida," turning to her sister, "you've not said a word about this extraordinary move of papa's. I never heard of anything so abominable, did you?"

"I don't know; I really don't think I care."

"Don't care!" exclaimed both Mabel and Julian.

"In fact, I believe I'd be rather pleased if it were worth the trouble. It's a change, anyway. We've had Newport, Newport, Newport, ever since I can remember."

"Well, if you find any comfort in *such* a change, you're lucky," answered Julian.

"Why, my dear Vida, we'll be buried alive!" cried Mabel; "and Newport's going to be particularly gay this summer. If this really happens, I shall simply die!"

"Gay! I'm sure I've been *gay* enough from the day I was born," said Vida. "As to this winter, it's been a perfect whirligig. I feel as if I never want to go through another season in my life."

"Great heavens! you must be ill," said Julian. "I never saw a girl who ought to enjoy herself more than you. You always have more attention than any other girl I know."

Vida shrugged her shoulders, and her lip curled scornfully. "From men with everything in their pockets and nothing in their heads, or their hearts either, for that matter. Men! How many *men* are there among them?"

"You are giving yourself airs. I don't know where you expect to find any better men than the fellows in our set. They're the pick of society."

"Perhaps I might find them out of our set, out of society altogether."

"Well, I must say!" exclaimed Mabel, with withering contempt. "Hitherto you've at least had some regard for family and decency."

"You need n't be alarmed," answered Vida. "I sha'n't be able to get rid of it if I want to. It's bred in the bone."

"Talking about fellows," said Julian, "there's Frank Vaughn; and, by the bye, why's he gone off to Europe in such a hurry?"

"Vida can tell you more about that than anybody else," said Mabel.

Vida started. "When did he go?" she asked as indifferently as possible.

"Tuesday morning."

Tuesday morning! That was why no answer had come to her letter. The explanation was a balm to mortified vanity and dignity.

"Did you give him the go-by?" asked Julian. "If you did, I must say I think you're a fool! Even you won't find many such fellows lying round loose asking you to marry them. You must be darn hard to please."

"We won't discuss my matrimonial taste," said Vida. "Who'll be at the theatre party to-night?"

The conversation drifted into trivial gossip about the people with whom they were going to pass the evening. It was carried on almost entirely by Mabel and Julian, Vida taking little or no part in it. Arrived at Mrs. Delafield's, they found the rest of the party assembled. It was a small one, only twelve persons in all. Vida's escort was a Mr. Ames,—an amiable young man of weak intellect, but decided views of social decorum, and an authority on all the latest fads and follies of fashion. The seats secured for the party at the theatre were in two rows of the orchestra, six chairs in each row, one set immediately behind the other. Vida was assigned to the last

row, and took the seat at the end of the line, having Mr. Ames on her right and a vacant place on her left.

Vida did not exert herself very much to converse with Mr. Ames during the few minutes after their arrival before the play commenced. However, it did not much matter, as the young man was volubility itself in his command of small talk, and rattled on contentedly. Just as the orchestra was finishing the last bars of the overture, some one seated himself in the empty chair beside Vida. She glanced carelessly at him, then started and blushed in confused surprise. It was the strange man of the Park. A quick recognition came into his face; but he checked his apparent impulse to speak, and properly left the choice of confirming or rejecting their peculiar acquaintance to her. For a second she hesitated, then bending her head, —

“Good-evening,” she said in an uncertain, not quite natural voice.

“Good-evening,” he answered. “I hope you got home the other day without any trouble.”

Vida made some commonplace answer, and then the curtain went up, and she was relieved somewhat from her embarrassment; but her pulses were beating nervously, her mind was unsettled, her emotions were in a painful tangle. She, Vida Radcliffe, had recognized a man whom she knew nothing about, and whose acquaintance she had formed without introduction in a public park. Yet what could she have done but recognize him? In spite, too, of her uneasiness and disturbed sense of propriety, she was aware of an undeniable satisfaction at seeing him again. She realized all at once how he had dominated her thoughts. During the last four days her condition had been peculiar. Her experience with this man, and her experience with Frank Vaughn, had seemed to whirl her into a position where the ordinary, egotistical life she had led was invaded by emotions and thoughts which filled her with restless, undefined pain. All the conditions had been such as to rouse and disturb her as she had never been roused and disturbed before. The friction of opposing circumstances had commenced in her life, the fer-

mentation of soul which means individual activity, change, growth, had begun. Gradually she regained her mental poise, and her attention became fixed upon the performance, her interest growing more and more absorbed as the plot developed. The writer possessed that rarest combination of gifts,—dramatic instinct and literary faculty. The central idea of his play was an original and daring one, and worked out with unusual skill and dramatic force. The dialogue was simple, but often very poetic; it was strong, at times impassioned, glowing with the life-blood of a heart that felt while the hand wrote.

After the first act, in which the spectator's interest was at once excited, Vida's new acquaintance turned to her. "Mira Lawrence is a very exceptional actress," he said. "Her art has such a pure emotional quality. Most actresses, if they're not cold and artificial, make love only a passion. They seldom even suggest the divine soul of it."

"I don't think I understand what you mean," said Vida.

"Well, you will," he answered, smiling.

Vida was looking over the program. She read the title of the play: "'A Social Test, by Winfred Grey.' Who's Winfred Grey?"

The question was prompted by that extraordinary impulse which sometimes leads people idly to ask for information already possessed.

"Who? Perish his vanity on the spot!" said the man.

"How absurd in me!" said Vida, irritated by her display of apparent ignorance. "Of course it's the Grey whose books are making such a sensation."

"That's better, much better," said the man.

"And the play's such a great success too!"

"For which he's devoutly thankful, I can assure you."

"You know him?"

"Slightly; no, more than slightly, fairly well."

Vida's friends in the row before her just then turned and claimed her attention. The man went out, and did not come back during the rest of the performance until two or three minutes

before the last curtain went up. The acting was excellent, and the drama, as it developed, grew more and more absorbing. The audience sat breathless, breaking out every now and then into enthusiastic applause. The play was affecting Vida strongly. Though the subject was a dangerous and difficult one to handle, and its treatment bold; though the author was wonderfully daring in the views he advanced and sustained, in some of the claims he made, some of the morality he preached, — it was all done with such consummate skill, such perfect absence of unclean suggestiveness, the logic employed was so clear, the tone of the play was throughout so pure, so noble, that its radicalism not only appealed to the reason, but excited the sympathies of the auditors.

The fourth and last act was nearly over. The front of the house was still with intensity of feeling. The scene was a strong, an infinitely terrible one in its heroic sadness. Suddenly at the back of the stage there was a disturbance. A panel of the box scene, evidently insecurely fastened, creaked, swayed, fell forward with a crash. Mira Lawrence stood where it would have crushed her if she had not sprung aside. The next moment a blaze flashed up from among the *débris*. The falling scenery had knocked over a lamp which had ignited some light drapery. Some one on the stage screamed; some one in the audience screamed. Half the house rose to its feet. Two or three men cried, "Keep still! sit down!" The flames shot higher. One impulse — fright — seized the crowd. In a panic it turned and rushed for the doors.

Vida's escort, little Mr. Ames, had no heroism in his constitution and an overpowering instinct of self-preservation. Vida had a vision of him scrambling over the back of his seat, then she felt a strong hand take her by the arm. She looked up and saw the strange man.

"You need n't be frightened," he said. "If you attempt to get out, you may be crushed. If you're quiet, you're perfectly safe. The fire's nothing; they've got control of it already."

Vida stood motionless. She glanced toward the stage. The hose of the theatre was already at work, and the flames were hissing and dying under the stream of water poured upon them. The fire-proof curtain had been instantly lowered, but some hitch had held it halfway. It now dropped entirely and shut off any further view of the stage.

Vida heard the rush of the fright-crazed audience, and felt the breathless, maddened terror of the frenzied, struggling human mass. Men, women, fought like animals to force their way out, thought only of escape, flying, as they imagined, from the devouring fire-fiend behind them. The stranger placed himself so as to protect Vida as much as possible from the pressure. He put one arm around her and with the other warded off the force of the surging crowd. Of course the worst part of the struggle was in the passages and on the stairways, but the stampede downstairs, though quick, was violent while it lasted. As it tore past, Vida thought it must trample down and crush her. But the arm that held her seemed of iron, and the form that shielded her of rock. She lost all fear for herself, only the horror of that wild flight of human beings for a moment overcame her. She shut her eyes, and unconsciously hid her face upon the shoulder of her companion. When she raised her head, the parquet was cleared.

"You behaved splendidly," said the man, releasing his hold and looking down at her with approval.

"Oh," she said with a shudder, "they seem mad!"

"And they are," he answered. "But you, — you're not hurt?"

"No. Will it never be over? How they're struggling and fighting there by the doors! They look as if they were tearing each other to pieces."

"We need n't watch it; we can go now. Come this way."

"My brother and sister — I'm anxious about them. I saw them rushing with the crowd."

"I don't think you need be worried. It's not likely any

one in the orchestra was seriously hurt. It was comparatively easy for them to get out."

She followed him without further protest, too awed to say much yet. He led her across the auditorium to the passage along the wall, back of the boxes through a low doorway. She looked about her in surprise and perplexity. They were upon the stage among the wings, — a region unknown to her as another world.

The fire was quite out, and the stage filled with people. The scene was one of wreck and excitement, — the place deluged with water, blackened and scorched by the smoke and the flames. Every one was talking; every one was gesticulating. The actors, in their costumes and make-up, stood about. The fire-engines had come, and several of the firemen were assuring themselves that everything was safe. Vida felt as though it were all some wild, fantastic dream.

"Will you mind waiting here one moment?" asked her companion. "I want to see just how bad it is."

"No; I sha'n't mind at all," she answered.

He went forward and laid his hand on the shoulder of a man whose back was turned to her. There was so much noise made by the excited people and the still-playing hose that she could not hear a word that was spoken.

"Well, Trenton," said her unknown friend, "this is a pretty scene!"

The man addressed turned, and Vida recognized the leading actor, — he who had played the lover.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, "is that you, old fellow? How did you get out of that crazy mob?"

"By keeping still. You've done some good work back here. If you'd been a little slower, Heaven knows what would have happened."

A lady, Mira Lawrence, then approached, and held out her hand to the new-comer.

"Is n't it terrible?" she said, trembling from the reaction of the danger passed. "Do you think any one's been hurt?"

"Probably a good many, I'm afraid. Hallo, Draper, don't look as though the world had come to an end. You ought to consider yourself blessed to be out of the business so well." Draper was the manager of the theatre.

"It's all the fault of that blamed idiot who opened his darned umbrella on the stage this morning," said the juvenile man, fiercely.

"He did it twice. No play can stand being hoodooed like that," said Trenton, with much heat and perfect seriousness. "He'll never try it again; I kicked him out of the theatre."

"You've no business to take such risks," said Vida's strange man. "Suppose he'd turned and casually broken your nose or knocked out an eye. You know your beauty's the mainstay of the house."

"I thought mine was," said the *ingénue*, with a coquettish glance, while Trenton threw a "property" pillow at him.

He caught the pillow and bowed to the *ingénue*. "On the contrary," he said to the young lady, "you are the management's most expensive luxury."

The expensive luxury forthwith pouted and looked deeply offended, while everybody else laughed.

"Since you entered the company, Draper's had to hire a special police detachment to keep the stage door clear."

"You need n't guy me, now," said the *ingénue*, peering up at him out of the corner of her eyes with her head on one side, a pert, pretty little figure.

"The vulgar creature!" thought Vida, watching from the wings.

"You're a selfish lot," said a disconsolate person, sitting a little apart; "why don't you pay some attention to me? These togs cost me two weeks' salary, and just look at them now."

Everybody turned to him and instantly burst into hilarious laughter. He was dripping wet from head to foot, his face smeared in red and black streaks, where he had wiped it, oblivious of "make-up."

"What in Heaven's name have you been doing to yourself?" asked Vida's friend, with unrestrained mirth.

"Yes; it's funny, is n't it? *You* would n't have been wet if a hose had been turned on you! *You* could walk through a water-spout and come out dry! You're in the miracle business, I suppose!"

"Not now. I performed my last miracle when I made an actor of you."

This was greeted with wild delight and applause by all except a dark, intense-looking woman, who did not like him.

"It's nauseating the way people are eternally salaaming to that man," she said, *sotto voce*, addressing a tall girl who sat near her. "I am going to ask him some day if Providence has given him a commission to run the whole earth as well as the whole theatre."

"Why don't you do it now?" inquired the tall girl, who did like him.

"Because, because — I don't do it now because the occasion is not fitting," replied the dark woman, with dignity.

Meanwhile the strange man had been protesting that he had a lady with him and must go; but so many people pressed around him and seemed to have so much to say to him that it was several minutes before he got away. In the manner of every one who approached him there was a warmth of greeting mingled with a sort of friendly homage, both singularly marked. The man's charm seemed to assert itself without his knowledge. His perfect simplicity and lack of self-consciousness were never for a moment disturbed. He finally made his escape, having solicited permission to call upon Mira Lawrence the next day, and promised to take afternoon tea with the *ingénue* at some indefinite time.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting," he said, as he rejoined Vida. "I hope you'll excuse me. I could n't very well help it."

"It did n't matter in the least," she replied. "It's all so strange. I seem as if I were in a sort of trance."

"You'll feel better when we get outside. This way. We'll go through the stage door."

Past the wings off the side of the stage, down a long narrow passage, lit by one gas-jet high up on the wall, Vida followed him. When she found herself in the street, she drew a long breath. All was quiet about them. Whatever disturbance there might be, was in front, near the main entrance.

"We'll go around to the other side and try to find your friends," said the man.

There was a great and excited gathering about the front of the theatre and all along the street. For a few moments they stood on the edges of the crowd, but there was scarcely a chance of seeing any of Vida's party.

"I don't think there's any use waiting," said the man.

"It's not at all probable you'll meet them."

"No," she said; "it seems hopeless."

"Well, then, tell me where I'm to take you."

Surely fate was playing some strange tricks in bringing her into such peculiar relations with this man. Here she was now in the street with him at eleven o'clock at night, entirely dependent upon his escort. A passing wonder that it disturbed her so little crossed her mind.

"I've given you enough trouble," she said. "If you put me in a cab, I can go home by myself."

The stranger laughed. "As you've escaped being crushed to pieces, I'm to trust you in the hands of the first hack-driver who comes along? Tell me where to go."

"Number — East Fifty-seventh Street. But I really feel very uncomfortable about your doing it."

As she told her address he looked at her with a quick, surprised glance. A quizzical expression came into his face, — an expression that seemed to say, "Well, this *is* queer!"

"How do you want to go?" he asked. "Will you take a car or a stage? Or will you walk part of the way? The air and exercise will do you good."

"Yes; I'll walk."

They turned out of Broadway into Fifth Avenue.

"I've read of such things, but I never knew they were so awful," said Vida.

"Second-hand information is no use for getting at the true value of things. Words are very shadowy symbols of the realities they stand for."

Vida looked up at him. He puzzled her. She did not know how to take him, how to talk to him. So many of his remarks seemed to imply so much more than she grasped. They were spoken lightly enough, but had an epigrammatic quality which yet, owing to the good-humor in his tone and manner, conveyed none of the epigram's usual impression of cynicism. She did not answer him because she could not answer. That she could not made her feel stupid, and this mortified her. It did not improve matters when he began conversing upon the topics of ordinary social chatter. She was sure he was exerting himself to talk down to her level. He was the first man with whom she had ever felt at a disadvantage, and she resented it. He was polite to the point of deference, but in an absolutely impersonal way. Of course no gentleman could have been otherwise, but silent appreciation of her attractions would not have been incompatible with good manners. Instinctively she knew that to this man these attractions were non-existent. In truth, he was calculating how long it would take him to reach Fifty-seventh Street, return to the theatre, learn the full extent of the night's disaster, and get to the Hoffman House, where he had an engagement to meet some friends. He was thinking, too, that his first estimate of mental and moral possibilities in this girl had been way out. She was in no sense distinguished from the multitudinous women of her class and type. Probably she received a half-conscious impression of his thoughts, for there arose within her an ardent wish to say something brilliant, to exhibit an interest in something profound. But she only succeeded in making some ordinary observations about the play and the fire.

A forlorn-looking figure—a woman—stood under an

electric light which they were approaching. She was dirty, and carried a dirty child in her arms. She stepped up to Vida and poured out a story of her husband's abuse and her own destitution. Vida drew her skirts away from the poor creature's rags. The man noticed the act. He put his hand in his pocket, and, bringing out some change, handed the woman a couple of dollars.

"These people are generally impostors," said Vida.

"Yes; but suppose this one is n't?" said the man.

There was an icy sound in his voice which made her uncomfortable.

"If there's a disgusting thing in the world," thought the man, "it's one woman's indifference to another woman's misery."

But the feeling that prompted the reflection was unjust. Vida was selfishly thoughtless, but not callous. She turned to look back at the woman, walking slowly down the silent street with the child heavy in her arms.

"If she is n't an impostor, it's very dreadful," said Vida. "I'd like to give her something too; but I have n't any money with me."

"She'll make what she's got do for two or three days," said the man, in the same frigidly polite tone. It stung Vida. She understood what an unfavorable impression she was making in every way, and her vanity was hurt. She remained silent for some minutes, while the man continued talking to save the situation. As the nervous tension produced by the scene she had gone through relaxed, she became fully conscious of the very unconventional character of her present action. She was embarrassed, and for a moment her habitual *savoir faire* almost failed her. What must this man think of her walking here so freely with him in the middle of the night? She grew hot imagining the criticism he was probably passing upon her conduct. To be sure, he himself had suggested walking, but that was nothing, — it in no way excused her. What if he felt justified in taking some unpleasant advantage of her indiscretion

and lack of propriety? The next instant she hated herself for the unworthy thought. How she wished she knew him, — knew him well enough to feel at ease with him, to talk of the half-formed thoughts and desires that had been flitting vaguely through her mind since their meeting in the Park!

"I think I'd like to take a stage now," she said.

They had very little conversation on the way up, but when they got out of the stage Vida began to speak immediately, though hesitatingly, as if saying that which she had been gathering courage to express. She was actuated by an irresistible desire to make him realize that she was neither so stupid nor so inert as had seemed. Why his opinion was of any consequence she did not stop to consider. It was of consequence, and the fact made her do a very childish thing.

"What you said the other day — in the Park — made a great impression on me. I've often felt there's something in life I don't know anything about, something I want. I — I've had a wild idea that if I ever saw you again I'd ask you to help me understand better."

Now, the man, though easily beguiled into unconsciously playing the preceptor, was much averse to having the rôle obviously thrust upon him. Besides, the time and occasion were hardly appropriate to ethical and philosophical instruction.

"I probably talked like a prig," he said, smiling to soften his lack of responsiveness. "And how do you know I'm not the biggest hypocrite, the blackest villain, in the city? The world's in a bad way, and the only safety for every individual seems to be to stand guard against every other individual on the face of the earth."

"You are a gentleman. In all you've done for me you've acted as only a gentleman could. My father will want to thank you for your kindness to me. You'll give him the opportunity?"

The extreme gravity with which he answered her might have suggested to a keen observer a suspicion of extreme amusement.

"Really, no thanks are necessary. Don't think of obliging your father to express any."

"But you'll let him show you some courtesy in return for all you've done for me?"

"You know all about the cat in a strange garret? The cat's always dreadfully uncomfortable, as he ought to be for getting in where he doesn't belong. I may meet you some day in more orthodox fashion," he added with the softening effect again in view.

A sudden recollection flashed into Vida's mind. "We're going away out of town next week, to Red Rock in Massachusetts. We sha'n't be back for six months or more."

"Red Rock on the coast?" he inquired with an alertness which she did not notice.

"Yes," she answered laconically, feeling that she had volunteered a piece of information which could not interest him in the least.

The same look came into his face as had crossed it on hearing her address.

"It's a beautiful place."

"You've been there?"

"Often; I know it well."

"What is it like?"

"It's a gateway into Paradise."

They had reached her house, and went up the steps. She held out her hand to him. "I'm very, very grateful to you," she said simply. "I shall hope to see you again some time, and show you how much I appreciate what you've done for me."

"We'll meet again," he said. "I'm quite sure of it."

"Won't you come in? I'll be very glad if you will," she said, as he stood with his hand on the bell. "My sister and brother must be here soon, if they're not back already."

Again the ambiguous smile crossed his face. "Thank you, but it's late. No; I won't go in." He rang the bell. As he heard the door opening, he raised his hat. "I hope you won't suffer from the excitement and fatigue you've been through. Good-night, Miss Radcliffe."

Her name! Vida raised her head in surprise. He was down the steps before she could answer him.

"Now why the deuce am I brought in contact with this girl?" he mused, as he went along the street, hoping he was not too late to catch the men at the Hoffman House.

CHAPTER V.

“**Y**OU'RE the most perverse, exasperating, pig-headed individual I ever came across.”

“Indeed! And you now expect to revolutionize these inborn characteristics?”

The first speaker was a short, rather stout little man of about fifty, with a round, smooth-shaven face that was very red, owing to the state of excitement under which he was laboring. He had advanced himself onto the extreme edge of his seat and was glaring at his companion with an expression that, upon any other cast of features, would have been positively alarming. As it was, his countenance being such as to suggest under normal conditions the most benign amiability, the uttermost which the fire of his eye and frown of his peculiarly smooth brow could do was to give him the appearance of a very indignant and irate jaybird.

His companion was Winfred Grey.

The two men were seated in a drawing-room car of the Boston and Maine line. Their destination was Huxton,—a station about two hours beyond Boston.

“Expect!” answered the little man to Winfred’s remark. “I don’t *expect* anything in connection with you. There’s no use expecting. You’re always doing what no mortal on the globe expects. Why the deuce don’t you do something that somebody else does? Why don’t you die, get married, anything?”

“Heaven forgive you! Have n’t I just written another novel?”

“And a pretty kind of novel it is! A novel no one else in the universe could have written, or would have if he could. A

nice piece of literature ! An attempt to turn the world upside down and inside out ! Attacking society's most respectable institutions ; setting up on the next page ideals a god could n't reach ! A glory or a scandal to the human race ! You ought to be hung for it or sainted ; no sane man can tell which."

Winfred looked with unmoved serenity in the face of his excited friend.

"God bless my soul ! I never heard such impudence. To refuse point-blank to be introduced to a man's relatives !"

"Excuse me ; I did n't refuse. I only told you I'm going home to work. I can't afford to get drawn into the whirl of your fashionable society." Winfred spoke with exaggerated gravity.

"Indeed ! There's a great deal of fashionable whirling at Red Rock ! It's nothing but an idle excuse ; it's no reason."

"You're not in a frame of mind to recognize reason. Now, if you'll just be calm —"

"Calm ! I am calm ; I'm perfectly calm ; I never get excited. You know perfectly well I never get excited." He took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead and face, which were perspiring profusely.

"Of course you don't. It's only natural animation. I've been trying to say that, instead of being indifferent to your relatives, I'm much interested in them. I'd like to hear something more about them. What are they doing at Red Rock ? I should hardly think they'd find it an enjoyable locality. It's as quiet as the grave."

"Of course they don't enjoy it. I—I'll tell you the truth," bending forward confidentially. "Radcliffe's an alarmist. That's the whole matter. He's had some trifling business reverses and got frightened. He began cutting down expenses ; plants his family here for the summer to economize. It's all rubbish. Radcliffe's an old fuss-and-feathers."

As his attention became diverted from his grievance, the little man's indignation subsided, and his complexion assumed a less rubicund tint.

"And how does the family take it?"

"Like the devil, — all except Vida. Vida's the flower of this flock, bless her heart! The rest — well, the rest are so infernally cold-blooded. There, now, that's a nice way to talk of my own kith and kin!"

"You're not to blame for the connection; you're to be commiserated."

"There you go again! Are n't family ties anything?"

"Yes; sometimes they're one of the sorest afflictions Providence puts on us."

"Hum! If those are your sentiments, it'd be more decent not to express 'em. Winfred," the little man grew extremely serious, "you're not conceited, but you talk, and write too, as if the world were gotten up expressly to give you an audience to applaud all your crack-brained opinions. And — and, damn it! you — you do all a man's thinking for him, and then the idiot does applaud you."

"You were talking about your relations; please come back to your muttoms."

"Now — now, Winfred, I'll tell you the truth;" again the little man grew confidential. "It's a sort of duty for me to be fond of these youngsters — for their mother's sake, you know. That woman was a saint on earth."

"She was your cousin, was n't she?"

"Yes; she was my cousin." The little man's eyes grew a trifle moist, and he wiped them surreptitiously under a pretence of mopping his forehead again. Had he ever longed that this saintly woman might be something more than his cousin? "I've a tender spot in my heart for all these children, but Vida — well, she was her mother's favorite, too. Confound you, Winfred!" he burst forth with sudden explosiveness, "it's abominable, outrageous in you to refuse to meet her!" He was all excitement again in an instant.

"On the contrary, I should be charmed to be presented."

"Well, upon my soul! Why could n't you say so at first?"

"I've said it twenty times, but you would n't listen. If

you'll give me a chance now, I'd also like to say that you'd better consult your esteemed cousin-in-law on the subject of introducing me into the bosom of his family."

"You are Winfred Grey, and my friend," said the little man, with dignity.

"Notwithstanding which high recommendation, Radcliffe'd rather open his house to a rattlesnake or any other unpleasant reptile."

"Winfred, you don't know *everything*. Radcliffe's an ass in a great many ways, but you've become more than ever a person *to know* since that crazy play of yours. If you chose, you'd be the rage next winter."

"When I decide to be put on exhibition, I'll hire myself out to a dime museum, thank you. Tell me something more about this charming young cousin."

Tom Ives became very thoughtful. He hesitated, and then spoke as though forced by the need of unburdening his mind. "There's something the matter with the girl. She's growing as quiet and serious as a professor of philosophy. I knew she had too much of her mother in her to be satisfied forever with the vapid existence of a society belle. I knew she'd get tired of it sooner or later, but it's come sooner than I expected. She's evidently getting tired now."

"Indeed! And what's your explanation of the matter?"

Tom Ives looked very wise. "Well, I've my theories on the subject. Perhaps they're right, and perhaps they're wrong. I'm not going to express 'em, anyway. But something happened to her about three weeks ago which affected her a good deal. She was in the Cosmopolitan Theatre the night of the panic."

"I suppose she was very much frightened."

"Not so much that. I don't think she was frightened for herself, but she was horrified, and the whole thing made a deep impression on her. Altogether, she had quite an adventure that night. Some man, an entire stranger, got her safely out of the crowd and then brought her home."

"I hope the rescuing hero didn't form part of Miss Radcliffe's horrible impression."

"Winfred, you need n't laugh," said Tom Ives, severely. "It may be very amusing to you, but it was n't at all amusing to my young cousin."

"I spoke entirely from solicitude for her."

"The man was a gentleman, and Vida was naturally very grateful to him."

"I suppose you found out who he was."

"No; he did n't give her his name, which seemed rather queer. Radcliffe naturally would have liked to thank him."

"He may have an opportunity yet," said Winfred, with the extreme gravity which he had already shown once or twice during the conversation.

"But he has n't the slightest clew to the man's identity."

"What does that signify? Have n't you lived long enough, Tom Ives, to know that the unexpected is always happening? How do you know that I'm not the man?"

"Perhaps you are. It'd be just like you to say nothing about it. Hallo! there's the whistle. We'll be at Huxton now in a jiffy."

Mr. Thomas Ives got up with great precipitation, pulled off his travelling cap, and put on a decorous silk hat, got out his bag and umbrella, let the porter brush him, then sat down and waited expectantly for ten minutes before the train pulled up at the little station of Huxton. Winfred at the last moment made his preparations of exit calmly and expeditiously.

"There she is, — there's Vida," said Tom Ives, as they stepped onto the platform. "See, in that cart over there. Well, my boy, as I'll only be here a day or two this time, I sha'n't see you again till I come back next week."

"All right. Good-bye."

"Wait a minute; here comes Vida now. I'll introduce —" Tom Ives, who had turned to greet the approaching young lady, turned back again and had his speech brought to an abrupt termination by discovering that Winfred was

already some fifteen yards away, walking rapidly up the platform.

"The devil!" ejaculated Mr. Ives. "He has n't any manners left!"

"Cousin Tom, Cousin Tom!" called Vida, who had driven up to the steps.

"Ah, Vida, my dear, you're a good girl to come for the old man yourself. Let me put in the bag. There," as he got in, and seated himself, "now kiss me and tell me the news."

They had a two-mile drive before them, and the day was perfect. The clear, salt air blew refreshingly in their faces as it swept straight in from the ocean over fields and through fragrant pine woods. The grass was bright with the unparched green of early summer and studded with a prodigal wealth of gleaming white daisy stars. The tender young grain bent and swayed in rhythmic motion under the wavering touch of the breeze. The sun kissed the cheek of Nature with the sweet warmth that thrills with half-coy delight. His caresses had not yet grown to the fiery intensity that burns and scorches what it woos.

"News!" said Vida. "There is n't any news. If we stayed here a thousand years, there would n't be any. We've had one event. The Wendells, those Boston friends of Aunt Clara's, who live in one of the only three houses near us, called a few days ago. I was out, Mabel would n't go down, Aunt Georgiana had a headache, and so they went away again. We'll return their call when Mabel stops sulking long enough."

"Mabel is — er — is still unreconciled? And Julian and Clara?"

"We have the prospect of living in a bower of bliss this summer, Cousin Tom."

"How's your aunt?"

"Cross and forlorn."

"Does your father enjoy the place?" asked the little man, in mild despair.

"I should n't think he would with every one in sight

moping and snapping. He has n't stayed here much. He seems to prefer town."

"And you, my dear, do *you* dislike it?"

Vida did not answer immediately. "It's pretty lonely," she finally said, "but there's a great deal about it that I like. It's so different from anything I've ever had before. The sea seems different from what it is at other places; and the rocks and the woods are beautiful. Cousin Tom, after a person's lived twenty-three years one way, do you think they can turn round and live any other?"

"I don't believe, my dear, I quite understand," said the little man, bewildered at the sudden change of subject.

"If you're brought up in one kind of life, you're not fit for any other kind, are you?—and another kind might be so *much* more interesting."

Cousin Tom was all at sea. He wished he could display a more intelligent grasp of what his fair young relative was talking about.

"Good people are always so depressing; and clever people—Aunt Clara says her Wendells are rampantly clever—clever people are sure to be dowdy, or æsthetic and untidy."

"Which are the Wendells?"

"I don't know; I have n't seen them. I hate dowdiness, and I can't stand sloppiness, but I'm tired of being what I am myself. I'd like to make a fifty days' trip around the world, or go up in balloons, or onto the stage,—*anything* to be different. I wish I were good, angelically good, with a passion for district visiting and personal discomfort. Do *you* think Red Rock's a gateway into Paradise?"

Cousin Tom started, the question was so irrelevant, and she asked it with such concentrated vehemence.

"It's certainly very lovely; yes, I suppose it is a paradise."

"Then it's a horribly lonely one, and I wish a few inhabitants would move in. Mabel and Julian are no good. They hate the place; they'll hardly stir from the house, and they're so disagreeable!"

"Well, well, it's pretty hard for such a brilliant young butterfly of the world. Your father's a — hem, never mind."

"Brilliant butterfly! It's a fine thing to be, is n't it? Cousin Tom, I wish you would n't talk as if I were a doll or an idiot, even if I have behaved like both all my life. If I were either, I—I shouldn't be so utterly miserable." And then and there Vida burst into tears, to Tom Ives's unspeakable consternation.

"Why, my dear, dear child, what is it, what's happened, whose fault is it?" His theory — the theory which he would n't reveal to Winfred — popped into his head at once.

"It's nobody's fault, or it's everybody's, I don't know which. I'm tired, tired, tired of thinking nothing, doing nothing, being nothing. I'm tired of all the people who are just like myself. I wish I knew people who have some brains and some ideas outside of clothes and horses and dinners and scandal. Only if I did, I'd be a perfect fool among them. Why has n't some one brought me up like a rational human creature instead of making such a failure of me?"

"My dear child," said Cousin Tom, helplessly, "you're not a failure; you're a very lovely and fascinating young lady." He looked at her somewhat sheepishly, hemmed and hawed once or twice, and then asked hesitatingly, "Have you ever thought — Have you ever cared — Is there any one you —" Becoming too much alarmed at his own question to be coherent, he floundered all around, and finally abandoned it abruptly.

"No; I'm not in love with any individual on the face of the earth, not even with myself at present," said Vida, divining his meaning.

"You're not! Well, then, what *is* the matter?"

"That's just what I wish somebody would tell *me*."

"I'd have made my affidavit it was some misunderstanding between young Vaughn and you, and, my dear, I was going to try to straighten it out," said Tom Ives, very much crestfallen.

"He asked me to marry him, and I wish I'd said yes,

instead of no, but not in the least because I'm in love with him. But I don't want to talk about it, please, and you need n't try to straighten anything." Vida had dried her eyes and in part regained her composure.

Tom Ives wanted very much to talk about it. There was no question but that he was shocked. His perennially youthful heart and verdant sentiments had never allowed him to assimilate the *fin de siècle* views and habits of the day. But he looked in Vida's face, which had grown almost hard, and held his peace. She also remained silent for some moments. When she spoke again, the hard look had gone. Her eyes swept slowly over the meadows to the sea.

"Yes; it's beautiful," she said. "I'm glad we've come. Cousin Tom, do you remember how good mamma was? Not in a depressing way, but a way that takes hold of you."

"She was the sweetest, noblest woman God ever created."

"I want to get free from the deadly dulness of behaving by rule and existing in ruts. I want to be what mother intended me to be."

"My dear," Cousin Tom laid a hand on hers, and a determined look settled upon his bland features,— "my dear, so you shall, if we have to defy every canon of Aunt Georgiana's social liturgy."

"You're a darling!" said Vida, a smile breaking over her face. "I knew if I talked to somebody—and you're the only somebody I can talk to—I'd feel better. Feeling things and having no one to tell, smothers me. There, that's the house," and she pointed to a large wooden dwelling of the disfiguring design which, twenty-five years ago, in the day of its conception, was considered appropriate to the country villa. "It's hideous outside and in, but the situation's grand,—right back of the rocks about two hundred feet from the water."

In a few minutes more they drove up to the steps of the Radcliffes' summer residence, and Cousin Tom was welcomed with some show of exuberance by his very much disgusted "kith and kin."

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER much grumbling, involving much discussion and counter-discussion, the Radcliffes had assembled themselves together to call upon the Wendells,—the aforesaid Boston friends of the aforesaid Aunt Clara, referred to by Vida as she drove Mr. Thomas Ives and his anxieties from the station.

Aunt Georgiana, Vida, Mabel, and Julian were Wendell-bound in the cart drawn by that one pair of hacks vouchsafed to luxury and unused legs by the millionaire prince, Radcliffe.

Briefly stated in play-bill fashion, the Wendells were as follows : —

John Wendell, father of the family, and professor of languages and literature.

Mrs. Wendell, mother of the family, kindly, matronly, educated by circumstance of intellectual husband and offspring three or four degrees above her natural mental level.

Harry Wendell, aged thirty-two, editor of a paper,—“The Week’s Echo,” devoted to topics of the times.

Margaret Wendell, aged twenty-six, addicted extensively to philanthropy and ethics.

Ethel Wendell, aged twenty-four, art student, given to spontaneity and unconventionality.

Clyde Wendell, aged twenty-three, lawyer of serious disposition and socialistic leanings.

Bertha Wendell, aged twenty-one, student at Smith’s College, with a taste for medicine.

As it happened, all the members of this diversified talent were just then assembled simultaneously under the paternal roof. With them was a friend, Gerard Harley, a distinguished young artist of thirty or thereabouts.

What will occur when frivolous New York is shaken into contact with this array of Bostonian intellect? Some of it — of the intellect — was seated on the veranda of its cottage this sunny June afternoon, while the army of the frivolous was on the march of descent upon it. Its members were enjoying the strong sea-breeze laden with brine and freshness, the organ-beat of the waves against the shore, the bending and swaying of the long meadow-grass, undulating in harmonic unison with the rise and fall of the ocean's swell, the dark rocks tossed together in rugged grandeur by that master hand of Nature, which never errs in its effects even when seemingly most careless of them. But while delighting in the day and its glories, the Wendell household was at the same time engaged in a much less exalted occupation; to wit, critical discussion of its approaching guests, the Radcliffes.

"I wonder if there's a planet where things are so arranged that one can choose one's neighbors," said Ethel, who had thrown herself into a hammock, quite undesignedly striking an attitude combining the picturesque with the comfortable.

"I suppose," said Gerard Harley, "you'd like a little twinkling star of your own labelled, 'No trespassing allowed.' I'd get my pretty wings dreadfully burned fluttering around it, begging to be let in."

Gerard had big soft hazel eyes that had never ceased looking out at the world with the expression of confiding innocence not supposed to survive infancy. His hair was soft and fine and black. The lines of his delicate features were indicative of rare sweetness of disposition and rarer purity of mind.

"Gerard," said Ethel, "I'll sketch you to-morrow with the most beautiful wings Margaret ever imagined. Then I'll paint the Radcliffe boy as a companion picture. I saw the pleasing youth yesterday as I went by their house."

"He belongs to a genus of humanity whose extinction should be legalized," said Bertha, didactically.

"Red Rock's day is over," said Harry. "We've been so delightfully primitive and savage, and now the Argus eye of pro-

priety will be turned luridly upon all our fondest indiscretions and lapses, and blast them into dead memories."

"Not at all," said Ethel; "*we* will blast propriety into speechless dismay. We'll take to Bohemianism of the wildest description, and revel in a continuous round of lawless eccentricities. I'll begin at once by letting my Titian-red hair down my back. Henceforth it shall float like a nimbus around my ethereal person."

Though they were so very clever and so very talented, they were much like other young, laughter-loving creatures, perhaps even a little more guilelessly mirthful. Are not the luminously intellectual and the temperamentally artistic supposed to retain through life an ingenuous childishness which no treachery of man or vicissitude of fortune can destroy? Be this as it may, out came Ethel's hair-pins and down came Ethel's red-gold hair, which the sun, that had crept around the corner of the veranda, took right into a flood of his burning rays till the young girl seemed wrapped in a perfect splendor of dazzling glory. A chorus of genuine admiration greeted the spectacle.

"This, ladies and gentlemen, is the first step in a downward course of practical naturalism, the direful consequence of too much Radcliffe."

"Really," said Margaret, in her quiet, unobtrusive, but nevertheless attention-commanding way, "really, we all talk as though these people were hardly human." (She had not said a word against them herself.) "I don't know that any of us are so superior that we're in a position to—"

"Wipe our Olympus-treading feet on them," interrupted Harry.

Gerard looked up quickly at Margaret as she spoke. "Saint Margaret!" he said. "As always, you call us back to heaven and its holiness."

"And then," said Clyde, "we feel on what a low plane the rest of us naturally grovel."

"Margaret's good, but incomprehensible," said Harry, with brotherly bluntness.

"Too true," indorsed Clyde, mournfully. "Margaret's an impossible muddle. The trouble is," he turned to her, "intellectually you're a clear-headed, reasoning creature, but by nature you're a fanatical conservative. Conservatism's your mental incubus; it's always getting in the way of your brains and tripping them up."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Ethel, who was looking out over the fields, "here are our material incubi in a bunch, the whole family!"

"Who?" asked Harry, in alarm.

"Radcliffes."

All eyes followed the direction of Ethel's, and there the Radcliffes were, without a doubt, driving right up the road to the cottage. A spontaneous and simultaneous movement of flight was made manifest by each individual man. An indignant protest from the girls and the fatal delay of a few moments' argument on the subject defeated the mean and egotistical impulse. The Radcliffes drove up to the steps, and retreat was impossible. Mr. and Mrs. Wendell were summoned, and then ensued a trial at the shaking together process which results in that temporary confusing of particles which some ignorant and optimistic persons take for harmonious co-mingling.

In the midst of a tentative conversation carried on by Vida and Clyde, Mabel's sharp, ringing voice caught Vida's attention. "Clara was ill, and papa took the place on her account," she was saying. "It's hopelessly quiet, isn't it? What *do* you do to kill time?"

Vida winced and colored at the prescribed and facilely spoken untruth.

Ethel, who was still displaying the wealth of her tresses unconcernedly and without apology or explanation, took it upon herself to answer Mabel, though the question was addressed to Bertha.

"Some of us write odes; some of us investigate the habits of crustaceans, sandpipers, and such things, with a view to the

Journal of Natural Science ; some of us immortalize the coast with our brushes ; some of us meditate ; and all of us develop the ego according to individual capacity."

"Do you ride?" Julian asked Clyde, picking him out as the most promising because the youngest of the male element present.

"Oh, yes," broke in Ethel again; "he rides an animal that's bound to kill him or somebody else some day. The rest of us ride it too — a little, but not so recklessly."

"Rawly? What is it? A hunter?"

"No; it's a hobby."

"Oh," said Julian, "we all ride that kind of a beast. My hobby's to get the best out of life with the least trouble. I suppose yours is first cousin to it?" He looked at Clyde.

Clyde, being a very serious person and very much in earnest, in addition to being very young, answered what he meant, not what a prevaricating politeness would have dictated.

"Mine is to get the best out of life for those who're given the dregs. You probably don't know it, but I'm a strong socialist."

"Indeed! I'm sorry to say I'm entirely out of sympathy with you, then," said Julian, frigidly. He turned to Bertha.

"Are you fond of dancing?"

Bertha was the one member of the family approaching in appearance the popular idea of the Hub's feminine populace. Somewhat self-satisfied, rather tall, rather thin, rather pale, with the typical eyeglasses adding to the austerity of her expression, she hardly suggested Terpsichorean indulgences.

"Possibly I might be if I had time for it. Beauty of motion is as much to be admired as beauty of form."

"O Lord!" inwardly groaned Julian.

"There's nothing in the world more interesting than to notice the wonderful adaptability of the body's mechanism to all the demands of ease and grace."

"It strikes me it's more wonderful how horribly it slips up in both. I never saw anything particularly easy or graceful

about a man with a jag on, or a woman running away from a cow."

"I'm not acquainted with the condition you allude to in the man. In regard to the woman, you cite a case where an abnormal state of mind interferes with balanced harmony of action."

"I'm glad you feel so kindly toward Red Rock," said Margaret to Vida. "And you don't begin to know its beauties yet. We're all the time finding new ones even now."

"I feel half ashamed to own it," said Vida; "but this kind of life is entirely new to me, and it's beginning to fascinate me."

"One has to love the country for its own sake to enjoy such a place."

"When one's able to recognize a tree as a sort of near relation," said Gerard, who was seated beside Margaret, "to walk along the shore and feel one's self turning into a mermaid or a merman, to fellowship with the crabs among the rocks, the toads in the fields, the beetles in the woods, to get transported by a blade of grass and intoxicated over a muscle-shell, one —"

"Experiences the involution of Nature into man, and the evolution of man into garrulous ecstasy," said Harry. "Miss Radcliffe, our worthy friend is quite irresponsible when he begins to rhapsodize. He ought to stick to his own business; he ought to paint more and talk less. He really paints very nicely indeed."

Vida smiled with unassumed amusement. "I think he talks very nicely indeed," she said. "I'd like him to go on." She began to feel an expectant, exhilarating satisfaction. Were these the people, the superior, inspiring people she was looking for? There was a freedom, an originality about them as attractive as novel to her. The breezy, happy-go-lucky atmosphere of the cottage had something stimulating in it.

"Miss Radcliffe," said Gerard, "your appreciation more than compensates for that man's brutality. Talking of talking reminds me of writing, and talking of writing reminds me of your last New York lion. Do you know we have him down here for the summer?"

"Whom do you mean?" asked Vida, feeling she was probably displaying lamentable ignorance.

"Winfred Grey. His family lives at Meadbrook, three miles inland. He's staying with them."

"Do you know him?" asked Vida, with interest.

"Very well," said Margaret. "We've known him ever since we first came to Red Rock. That's nearly ten years ago."

"When he was still experimenting with his genius," said Harry.

"Tell me about him," said Vida. "I saw his play just before I left home, and liked it immensely."

"He's had a variegated career," said Harry. "He entered Harvard when he was seventeen, but never graduated because he could n't stand the constraint of prescribed study. He quit after two years and gave his mind loose rein to educate itself, got a position in a banking house, and stuck to it for a while, though he hated it like poison. All the time he was studying life and books promiscuously."

"Then," broke in Clyde, "there was a big railroad strike in Cincinnati where he'd been transferred. It was getting very serious — they'd started rioting — when one day, right in the street, he forced his way into the middle of a violent mob and began talking to the men. That was practically the end of the riots, and the end of the bank, too, for Winfred. He'd caught the fever of his own power, and the bank presidency would n't have held him. He was n't twenty-two, but he began lecturing —"

"And made a howling success of it," said Harry, resuming the narrative. "He struck the right key at once, as he always does, and was making himself known even then; but his mind was in the tentative state still, and he could n't tie himself down to one thing. From the lecture platform he drifted onto the stage, and for two years was the beau ideal *jeune premier*. He was getting a name as an actor; but I suppose interpreting other people's ideas did n't furnish scope enough for his restless creative genius, and besides he became fired with the spirit of

adventure, and secured an appointment as secretary of a wild, so-called scientific expedition to East Africa. He brought back with him the manuscript of a book that was of more actual value than all the ponderous authorized reports put together. He got it published and scored a new success, but did n't stay to profit by it. He'd contracted the roving mania, and started off to investigate the globe on his own account. He wrote some brilliant letters and sent them to one of the New York papers. They were taken at once, and he was engaged to furnish a certain number right along."

"His next achievement after he got home again," said Clyde, "was taking the editorship of a magazine on the point of collapse and resuscitating it completely. He was over thirty then, and beginning to calm down and settle into his right place. He brought out a volume of poems the following year, original and striking as everything that he does."

"Passionately imaginative, but controlled by that undercurrent of moral force that gives the touch of firmness and durability to all his writing," said Margaret.

"His editorial work had made his name among literary people; his poems gave him a public reputation at once. Then came essays, more poems, novels, and finally his play, tumbling out on top of each other; and now he's a celebrity," wound up Gerard, enthusiastically.

"He's the most versatile piece of brains I ever came across," said Harry. "A man who makes his success as a novelist has n't any business to evolve suddenly into 'America's greatest dramatist' as well, not to speak of his excursions into the fields of essay and verse."

Vida, listening to the eulogy, sat thinking how inadequate her society accomplishments would be in the presence of such a man, how inadequate they were to compete with the acquirements of this gifted circle into which she had incongruously been dropped. Perhaps something in the expression of her face prompted Margaret's next remark.

"He's just as unaffected as though being a genius were the commonest thing in the world," she said.

"Indeed he is," acquiesced Gerard, a look of admiring affection lighting up his eyes. He was talking of the man he loved best on earth. The two had taken to each other from the first, when they had met years before, and had been friends and chums ever since. "All the same," Gerard added, "sometimes Winfred's very formidable to me. When he gets on one of his flights of high-tide inspiration, I subside into speechless awe. He looks as if he could lead a heavenly host to the conquest of a planet. He's conscious of his power too, if he does n't show it. He does n't know the meaning of the word 'fail.' He's never failed at anything in his life."

"And he does it all with the disgusting ease of a trained acrobat turning a handspring," said Harry. "It makes you mad because it looks so delightfully simple, and you know if *you* tried it you'd kill yourself."

"I've my doubts as to the wholesomeness of never failing," said Margaret. "It encourages too much self-confidence to be safe even for genius. It makes us forget that we did n't originate ourselves or our faculties."

"And sometime 'pride must have a fall,' the man must meet his Waterloo, is that the idea?" asked Harry.

Gerard looked at Margaret with a sort of devout admiration. "To be able to grasp and accept your beliefs of life of the soul, of our relation to God," he said, "I'd sign away my coming masterpiece—if I could know it when it appears. Don't give me up, Margaret. I *want* to understand; I *want* to believe."

"You never will, my boy, not as Margaret does," said Clyde. "Margaret's born that way, and you're not. Her brain's constructed for theology, as yours is for art. The two don't go together in this age."

Vida looked inquiringly at Margaret, who smiled and turned the conversation.

"Would you like to go down to the rocks with me some morning?" she asked Vida. "I can show you some lovely nooks and views you won't be apt to find by yourself."

"I'd like it very much indeed."

"I'll call for you to-morrow at ten o'clock, then, if you say so."

At this moment Aunt Georgiana got up and gave the signal of departure to the younger Radcliffe element, — a signal responded to with willing alacrity by Mabel and Julian. The party drove off all bows and smiles, as was only decorous, and not at all incompatible with the rapid change of countenance permissible as soon as beyond sight of Wendell eyes.

"Well, that's over," said Miss Radcliffe, as she folded her hands with a sigh of relief. "It's perfectly *astonishing* how uninteresting these clever people can be, and how *ignorant*. They actually knew nothing about Barton Neville's last escapade, and they'd never heard of Laura Pennington's divorce from the Marquis. I'm sure *that's* made scandal enough for *everybody* to know it."

"I'm blamed if I'll stay in a hole where such people are let loose," said Julian. "I've an invitation to the Oakleys, and I'm going to-morrow."

"And *I'm* going to accept one from Dora Grinnell," said Mabel. "She's a dreadful little prig, but she does n't squint at you through eye-glasses and entertain you with dissecting-room horrors, and she does n't wear a ton of hair dangling down her back and blowing in your face. The artist is very good-looking, is n't he? I must say I don't see what he finds to adore so conspicuously in that eldest girl. She looks as if she eats encyclopedias, binding and all."

So the Radcliffes of the Wendells.

"Margaret," asked Ethel, as their guests disappeared behind the house, "do you think they'll ever reach heaven? In what stage of development do you consider their souls? I suppose you insist upon it that they have souls."

"The eldest is a very interesting girl," said Margaret.

"And dazzlingly beautiful," supplemented Harry.

"I wish she'd give me an order to paint her portrait," said Gerard.

"Beautiful!" said Ethel. "Her lines are all right, but she has n't any more feeling in her face than a wooden manikin."

"Oh, you're entirely mistaken there," said Gerard. "Her expression changed wonderfully when she got interested."

"You're old enough not to be hoodwinked quite so thoroughly by the first professional beauty you run into," said Ethel, shrugging her shoulders. "Are you really so *naïf* that you don't know the tricks of the trade when you see them? That kind of a girl means to have every man she meets at her feet. She's decidedly clever about it, I grant you."

"You're entirely unfair," said Clyde: "the girl has brains and feeling; she's by no means an empty-headed coquette."

"You too!" said Ethel, raising her eyebrows. "There only remains our eldest brother."

"Who would not at all object to any amount of wiles the charming one might condescend to practise upon him, but who's obliged to admit that she paid him not the slightest attention?"

"The other girl's the most ill-informed person I ever saw, and the boy's rudely flippant," said Bertha. "And as to the aunt! Mother, I sincerely pitied you."

"My dears, I think it would be much better if you picked beams out of your own eyes and let other people's motes alone."

CHAPTER VII.

AT first thought almost any one would have pronounced Margaret Wendell and Vida Radcliffe very ill-assorted companions,— the one cultivated, disciplined in mind and heart, with a natural benevolence softening an unusual strength of character; the other superficially educated, bred to self-indulgence, childishly unconscious of duties and moral obligations,— the one living for the forsaken and forlorn, the other for the sole gratification of self. And yet as Vida leaned forward and looked earnestly into Margaret's face, there was an expression on her own that compelled recognition of mental power that had never been used, of soul and heart wealth that had never been developed.

They had been strolling about together for an hour or more, hunting up Margaret's promised nooks and views, and, growing tired, had sat down by the ocean under the shadow of a rock. The gentle lap, lap, of a calm sea against the shore sang a ceaseless monotone of peace and rest. The sunlight had in it the glitter peculiar to midsummer days when the atmosphere, clear, transparent, interposes no softening mist, no blending haze. The conversation had taken a personal turn, with Margaret and her philanthropies for the subject.

"And you devote your whole life to these people?" asked Vida.

"I can't say that," answered Margaret. "I don't believe in neglecting home duties for outside ones, and I feel we're bound to cultivate whatever faculties we possess."

"I suppose it sounds very selfish, but do you never get tired of it all?"

Margaret paused a moment before answering. "Yes, sometimes, very tired in a way. The individual can do so little compared to the terrible need. But no one who has n't had the experience can imagine the kind of happiness that comes from giving new hope to a breaking heart or new life to a despairing soul. It's a happiness too intense and holy for words to express."

Margaret had been telling of her connection with various charities, and her work among the "poor" of her kind. Vida had never talked to an active philanthropist before. She thought it was the subject of the converse that impressed her, but in reality it was Margaret's earnestness. Forlorn humanity in the abstract was yet beyond the limits of Vida's interest. She sat silent a moment, then said in a low voice, "I've never done anything for anybody in all my life."

"We are not meant to live that way," said Margaret.

"I wish I could *want* to sacrifice myself for other people," Vida spoke uneasily.

"I don't think many people want to at first," answered Margaret. "In the beginning it's apt to be simply a question of duty."

A disturbed look came into Vida's face. "I suppose it's living for ideals and principles?" she said.

"Yes," replied Margaret.

"It's very hard for people who've never done it," Vida sighed. This new view of life was complicated and troubling.

"Very hard," said Margaret, gently; "but the compensations are very great."

"I'm afraid I'll shock you," said Vida, "but do you know I don't believe much in anything, — I mean the kind of thing most people call religion."

"It's better to have no religion than to have a bad one," said Margaret.

Vida looked at her in surprise. "I supposed you were very — very strict in your ideas."

"I think I am. Tell me what you do believe."

"I can tell you better what I don't, — what's been preached at me all my life. I go to church because everybody does, at least women do, — it's the thing, — but one can't accept impossibilities."

It was the old story of the modern mind in protest against the swaddling-clothes of the ancient.

"A great many people feel as you do," said Margaret.

"Have you ever felt so?"

"No; belief is born in me, I think." Margaret reflected a moment. "For the present, leave aside the mysteries which you can't accept, and look at the purely rational phases of religion."

"I can't leave them aside without leaving out the pith of the whole question, so far as I can see."

"All the world believes in a power creating and sustaining life. People call it by different names. I call it God. It's the one omnipresent fact of the universe and the one source of all existence. We can't separate ourselves from it, but we can live in harmony with it by conforming to its laws, or out of harmony by violating its laws."

"I don't know what its laws are," said Vida.

"It's easy enough to know some of them if we look at the results of our own actions. The results of lying, stealing, drunkenness, licentiousness, envy, hate, temper, are very disorderly and painful; they violate every law whose observance makes life true and happy."

"Good people are often miserable and bad people perfectly comfortable." Vida did not feel combative, but was simply stating an obvious fact.

"No one is so good as to live in harmony with all laws of right."

Vida was poking the end of her parasol into a crack in the rock. She stopped and looked up. "I never thought of that," she said, unconsciously betraying how little she had thought at all. Her revolt from doctrinal religion had been the instinctive, not the reflective, action of a naturally clear brain.

"Then the practice of evil—say cheating, for instance—may quite well gain a material benefit for a time, and gratify the selfishness that prompted the cheating, but it disorders the whole moral and spiritual nature and makes the highest kind of happiness utterly impossible. As to the trials and deprivations of people trying to live up to a high standard of right, they suffer in a great measure from the wrong of others, for no one exists independently of his fellow-beings."

"That's exceedingly unjust," said Vida, knitting her brow. The recollection flashed upon her of what the strange man had said about those who live for ideals and principles,—"happy, but nevertheless generally poor and often ill-used people," he had said they were. It was all very disturbing. Peace and joy in adverse worldly circumstances she could not imagine.

"It seems unjust looked at in a narrow way, but the happiness of a good man or woman is something so lofty and complete that it outweighs external troubles."

Vida broke off some crumbling bits of rock as she answered doubtfully, "I suppose one's got to *be* good before one can realize that. I *can't* see how it's fair."

"If you take humanity in the mass, the connection between virtue and happiness and sin and suffering is plain. It's logically inevitable that every person must reap as he sows. Because at the age of seventy or eighty a bad man occasionally goes down to his grave rich, apparently satisfied and comfortable, we conclude that he's had his good time, defied truth and righteousness, and escaped all just consequences. If we could see what comes after, we might find him working out some very awful conditions he had prescribed for himself."

"*You* are naturally good," said Vida.

"Indeed I am not," answered Margaret, sadly, Vida thought. "Good to me is a constant struggle; it must be with most people."

"I suppose so; nothing's easy that one wants, — at least it is n't easy to get what one wants." Vida frowned. Margaret's

theories were interesting, but seemed very abstract and difficult of application. She would think them out for herself.

Suddenly through the noonday stillness arose the sound of a sweet voice singing a blithe ballad with the abandon of exuberant satisfaction.

"It's Ethel," said Margaret; and the next minute the joyous singer came into view around a projecting point.

"I thought I'd find you," she cried, springing lightly over the rocks with elastic surefootedness. "Good-morning, Miss Radcliffe."

"Have you been painting?" asked Margaret.

"Yes, Gerard and I've come out for the day." She sat down beside them. "We've got our lunch with us and sha'n't be home for dinner."

"Where is Gerard?" asked Margaret.

"Back there, somewhere. He went down to the water to wash his hands preparatory to eating. We're as hungry as crocodiles."

Vida had not realized during the preceding day's call how attractive Ethel was. She had thought her rather too sharp, too much inclined to scintillate at other people's expense. To-day there was no trace of such tendency. Indeed, there was an irresistible fascination about her, and she was so unmistakably on good terms with herself and all the world that her humor was contagious.

"Miss Radcliffe," she said, apparently trying not to smile, "mother's been giving me a lecture, and I feel very much ashamed of myself. She says I mustn't be naturalistic,—except on canvas. But when you've red hair, and every one tells you how adorable it is, how can you resist the temptation to pose as a hair-invigorator advertisement?"

"In other words, you want to apologize for yesterday's performance?" said Margaret. "Ethel does n't habitually depart so far from accepted social usages, Miss Radcliffe."

"I begin to feel as if I'd like to forget all about social usages," said Vida. "I may end by falling into the state of primitive man if we stay here long enough."

"Praised be the fates!" cried Ethel. "We can open our arms then, and take you right to the inner circle of our improprieties."

"Will you really?" asked Vida. "You'll find I've a genius for following examples."

"Signed and sealed this 10th day of June, 1892. Vida Radcliffe, Margaret Wendell, Ethel Wendell." As she spoke, Ethel traced the words on the rock with her finger-tip.

When in a few minutes Margaret looked at her watch and said it was time to go home to dinner, Vida felt that a bond of companionship had been well established between these bright young women and herself,—a more interesting and profitable companionship than any she had hitherto known. Margaret asked her to dinner; but she did not accept, as both Mabel and Julian were to leave that afternoon for their respective visits. Ethel then invited her to take tea with them the next evening, and to this she very willingly consented.

"It's one of our privileges to have tea when we're here," said Ethel, "and we would n't abandon it for anything. Late dinners don't fit Red Rock."

Margaret bade Vida good-bye, as their ways lay in different directions. The other two girls stood watching her as she went over the rocks as lightly and securely as Ethel, but more sedately. She turned the point around which Ethel had come, and was hidden from sight.

"There's not a second edition of Margaret on earth," said Ethel. "Any one who knows her, knows her right through and through, can't help thinking her the first woman in all the world. *Nobody* can help loving Margaret, and nobody can care a pin about anybody else if they can get her." For a second Vida thought a shadow crossed Ethel's face; but if it did, the sunshine flashed over it again instantly.

Margaret went on her way with a serene, soft light in her blue eyes. The missionary spirit stirred within her,—that instinctive attribute of most good women which makes anybody and everybody's reformation their special vocation. She was

thinking of Vida. Was this soul about to reach forth from its cramped environment to find and grasp reality, and if so, how could she best help it?

She had not gone very far when she saw Gerard standing close to the sea with his back to her. She paused a moment, then turned toward him, approaching so softly that any slight noise she made was lost in the murmur of the water at his feet.

"Where are you, Gerard?" she asked laughingly, as she reached his side unnoticed.

He started; then his eyes lit up with pleasure. "You must float through space like a veritable spirit," he said. "I was wherever you were. I was thinking of you. I was thinking what wonderful pictures I could paint if I could put your soul into my hands. My own soul does n't half use them."

"You're very ungrateful to your soul. Has n't it won you five prizes and pages of adulation? Is n't it carrying you to the highest peaks of artistic triumphs?"

"Its wings are stolen; I've taken them from you." Gerard was not paying a compliment; he was in simple, ingenuous earnest.

"That's a pretty piece of poetic license; but it would be deplorable if it were true. Everybody ought to fly with his own wings."

"I won't argue about it. I know how it is, and that's enough." Gerard had such a wealth of sweet, sunny happiness in his face it was a delight just to look at him.

"Ethel says you're going to be out all the afternoon," said Margaret.

"Yes, she's making me work like a convict; but I don't mind, for she's a perfect ocean of sunbeams to-day; she shines all over and through one."

Margaret looked down a moment with a troubled expression.

"Yes; she's bright and happy as possible this morning. But, Gerard, do you think she's quite well? I'm sure she's getting thin, and sometimes she's so irritable. It is n't at all like her, you know. And then she seems to exaggerate any

cross little thing she does say and is so disproportionately sorry for it. She's asked me to forgive her several times as though she had really done something serious."

"It's the heat," said Gerard, with masculine facility of explanation.

"But she's never been so before. I don't want to be ridiculously anxious, and I have n't said a word about it till now. Please don't speak of it either."

"No, and don't you think of it. You've only to see her climbing about among the rocks and hear her singing as she does to-day to be sure nothing's the matter."

"I dare say you're right, and I'm worrying myself with notions. Well, good-bye, I must hurry."

"You're not going already?"

"I must; I'll be late now."

"Stay and have lunch with Ethel and me. We've enough for a dozen more."

"I'd be sure to stay too long and waste your time and my own. I've a fresh-air-fund report to make out and send to town this afternoon."

"Well, will you go down to the rocks this evening? I have n't seen you two minutes to-day."

"Yes; I'd like to very much."

He walked along with her until she stopped and told him to go back. "Ethel will be waiting," she said.

"Good-bye, then, sweet Saint Margaret." He took her hand and stooped and kissed it. Margaret flushed vividly.

"We have n't adopted foreign customs to that extent yet," she said, with a little confused laugh. Then she left him; but her heart did not beat quite normally for at least five minutes, and there was a strange little flutter of joy chasing its lights across her face.

In the mean time Vida and Ethel had parted with pleasant feelings of mutual good-will. Not a trace of Ethel's former criticism of this new neighbor seemed to have survived the hour of its utterance. She stood smiling and waving her hand till

Vida disappeared behind the rocks. Then a change as complete as it was sudden occurred. Her arms dropped heavily to her sides; she bent like a broken flower under a rush of savage wind; a drawn look swept all the youth and radiance from her face. She stretched her hands out with a passionate movement.

"Oh, God, why did you let it be?" she cried. "Why did you let it come into my heart? Why, why, why?" For a moment it seemed as though she would break down entirely, but she suddenly raised her head and a feverish glow came into her eyes. "I have to-day, all to-day. It's mine, and I'll drink every drop of it. I won't think, I *won't* spoil it."

She broke out into the song she had been singing before, and started back to join Gerard.

Vida went home in a radiant frame of mind.

It is a charm and a weakness, a virtue and a fault, of certain characters to adopt any new object, throw themselves precipitously into any new phase of life, line of thought, or conduct that presents itself replete with untried and novel possibilities. Such is especially apt to be the case with an impulsive nature that has been artificially conformed to conditions neither proper to nor wide enough for its real dimensions. An apparently trivial incident, casting the balance of a straw's weight on the right side at an auspicious moment, had suggested to Vida the existence of strange, unknown realms of thought and experience. A new want took possession of her soul. She neither understood it nor knew how to attain it, but two conclusions she had reached. Society with a big *S* was a bore; society with a smaller *s* — represented to her mind by Red Rock and the Wendells — was interesting, vivid, and picturesque. The æsthetic atmosphere of the Wendell household on the one hand, and on the other Margaret's devotional aims and labors, an idealizing recollection of her own mother, and a natural genius for enthusiasms, — each and all of these factors fired her with a sudden fervor of aspiring resolve. In the midst of it reigned the memory of the strange man of the Park. If he ever crossed her steps again, he should find her a very different person from the silly, senseless creature

she had appeared. She was going to launch into a life of poetic, impressive usefulness. With the ardor of a new, untried purpose she would have liked a small-pox patient to nurse, or somebody to rescue from a burning edifice, or one of a thousand other deeds to perform demanding supreme and magnificent devotion. The only thing which could be construed into a duty presented itself in the unideal form of Clara. After Mabel and Julian had left, Clara wanted to go for a drive, but objected to the victoria and coachman, and was not allowed to use the phaeton and drive herself. Vida, in the flush of her new beneficence, consented to go with her, though close companionship with the young person for any length of time was sedulously avoided by all who had once suffered therefrom. Before they got home Vida concluded that the small-pox patient would have constituted a very mild form of discipline compared to her sister. She started with the clearly defined intention of meeting all annoyances with a smile and subduing them with gentle moral suasion. For nearly an hour she exercised unparalleled self-control while Clara jumped up and down from the seat, stood on the phaeton step, grabbed the whip and flicked it over the back of the nervous horse, tore Vida's lace parasol, which she had brought, though forbidden to do so, and indulged in an infinitude of additional perversities no list of which could ever be made.

Vida, outwardly calm, hanging on desperately to her new principles, was slowly, surely reaching an inward state of flaming exasperation. Thought of the one reprehensible thing which she had not yet done suddenly entered Clara's mind. She was going to drive. She made a dash at the lines, turning the horse's head violently to one side. The startled animal gave a wild plunge, the wheel cramped, and Vida and Clara were promptly deposited on mother earth, horse and phaeton speedily taking to themselves wings down the road.

Neither of the two girls was in the least hurt, but both were very much rumpled and disordered. As soon as they got on their feet, Vida, with cheeks burning and eyes flashing fire, took

the thoroughly terrified culprit by the shoulders and shook her till she gasped and her own arms ached.

"You're the most detestable little wretch that ever lived," she said; "I wish to goodness every bone in your body had been broken. I'll let you take root before I go anywhere with you again as long as you live."

The girl began to whimper. Vida gave her one more thorough shaking and marched down the dusty road, her principles scattered to the winds. Clara followed dolorously, every now and then making a woe-begone remark which elicited no reply whatsoever. A farmer in his wagon overtook them, and, with the genial good-fellowship of his kind, offered them a "ride." Vida accepted thankfully, ordered the still whining offender into the vehicle, and mounted beside her. In such fashion they proceeded to within a quarter of a mile of their house, then they had to get down and walk the rest of the way, the farmer's road lying in another direction.

CHAPTER VIII.

VIDA was sunk in the lowest depths of depression. She had experienced an entire revulsion of feeling. The exaltation of the day before had collapsed ; all her enthusiasm was as dead as a bottle of carbonated water left uncorked over night. Everything was dark, hopeless, and useless. In addition, everything was perverse. She had been nagged and annoyed from the very moment she had opened her eyes that morning, half an hour late because Miles had forgotten to call her. Now, at last, in the afternoon, she had fled the house in disgust and come out to the rocks. Aunt Georgiana had talked up the phaeton catastrophe with tireless persistence all day long. Clara had quite recovered her normal capacity for misbehavior and exercised it energetically. The servants, Miles establishing the precedent, had been aggravating past endurance. The laundress had carelessly burnt a hole in a favorite white dress. The chambermaid had upset the inkstand over her choicest lace handkerchief. The groom had lamed her saddle-horse by riding him too hard on the way to have a lost shoe replaced. What was the use of attempting to be anything or do anything with such an accumulation of troubles destroying all mental and moral balance and interfering at every turn with the application of any lofty plan of life? If only she could be among people who were amiable and considerate, righteously disposed, and given to seemly carefulness, she knew she could accomplish the meditated self-reform. She could be amiable herself then, and patient ; could organize charities, and execute all sorts of stupendous projects for the complete routing of evil from the globe. Tied down in the

midst of so much human wickedness, there was no use trying. Of course, it never occurred to her that she might begin to rout this particular batch of wickedness, none other being procurable. It never occurred to her that one cannot display patience unless one has something to be patient with. But then everybody knows that the attractive work one is not given to do is that which one ought to be given, and the disagreeable work assigned is the work somebody else is meant to do. People don't theorize about it or set it down thus categorically. They simply have an instinctive perception of the fact, and, by fortunate natural inclination, adjust themselves to it spontaneously. In the face of such mistakes of Providence there is but one reasonable course to pursue, — adopt a plan of masterly inactivity and await the time when the Almighty may discover and rectify his error.

A young soul that begins to ask for something better than the old idleness, something higher than the old indifference, is fore-ordained to some hard experiences. The poor, feeble, ignorant little soul finds its first lesson so hard to learn; namely, that Providence may be right, after all, and it must mould commonplace images out of the material at hand before it can attain strength and skill to hew noble statues in the great life studios of the world. The alphabet of righteousness is no whit more interesting or inspiring, no whit less tedious to acquire, than any other alphabet under the sun.

Vida went along the shore, not noticing much the scene before her, though already loving it. In the midst of perplexities and uncertainties Vida recognized one fact, — her life was taking a new turn. Dating from the adventure in the Park, every event of any importance that had since occurred seemed a remarkable continuance in a chain of singular circumstances, of which the strange man was the first link. The strange man mingled with every episode of her new experience, had a subjective place in each one. Would she ever see him again? His implication that they would meet again was so vague that she could feel no certainty about it. She was angry with herself for caring.

Men were wont to show an appreciation of her society and eagerness for her favor, which this one man had in no degree manifested. He had been more than courteous, had been chivalrous as few are in these modern days of mannerless ease ; but he would have been equally so to an old washerwoman. Personally she was not a bit more interesting to him than would have been a plain-featured little shop-girl, perhaps not so much so. She felt it with a woman's accuracy of intuition. Her pride rebelled at the amount of thought she gave him, though her interest was distinctly not in *him*, she understood, but in his ideas, — purely in his ideas.

To Vida this man was an inhabitant of an unknown world. The Wendells belonged to the same world. They all were something or did something. There was not a useless individual among them. She hastily reviewed her own attainments. Was there a single one of the slightest value ? She could paint dinner-cards after a fashion if she had a copy, and at one time had ruined a lot of good china decorating it, as she then called it. She had acted in private theatricals with considerable *éclat*, but the ability to do so was of intermittent usefulness, private theatricals not being a continuous feature of every-day life. She could play waltzes with much spirit, and knew two of Chopin's nocturnes, some of Mendelssohn's Songs Without Words, and a few other things which she executed with some feeling and a minimum of skill. Her teacher told her she had talent and could play well with sufficient practice. But she never had time to practise. She had read a fair amount of good literature, and was pretty well up on the lighter books of the day. She generally knew good pictures, having acquired a sort of instinct in regard to them, through seeing a great many. In the same way she recognized and enjoyed good music. But she had no intelligent understanding of either. She was as ignorant as a babe concerning all the vital political, social, intellectual questions of the time. The strange man and the Wendells undoubtedly had them all at their finger-tips. On the whole, she came out of her self-inspection ignominiously, but with a brand-

new resolution added to the one taken yesterday, and which now looked so discouragingly impractical, — a resolve to educate herself. She'd send to the city for a ton of books and magazines and begin at once. And perhaps circumstances would somehow change and give her a chance to cultivate the moral virtues she aspired to as well as the intellectual powers. Perhaps a way might even be opened for the performance of the grand philanthropies dimly imagined.

She looked out at the sea. It was very blue, with a long heavy swell sweeping its surface and breaking in regular beats upon the shore. The tide was coming in. Yesterday she had walked way out as far as a very large rock up which she had climbed. It was quite surrounded by water now. Was something moving on it? Surely no living thing. Everybody knew it was entirely covered at full tide. Even now the waves washed over it, and the ledge leading to it was deep in water. Something was moving. An arm was waving wildly, — a child's arm. All thought of philanthropy and heroism vanished from Vida's mind. It was time for acting, not dreaming. The child was in imminent danger. Vida sprang over the rocks with a speed and sureness that would have been impossible at a calmer moment. She reached the water's edge. There were two children on the rock instead of one, — a boy and a girl. She threw down her hat, unfastened her heavy serge skirt and dropped it, then plunged into the water. She could swim very little, but did not think the water would be above her head yet, and there were only thirty or forty feet to go. Fortunately the formation of the shore broke the strength of the waves; but as she got further out she was obliged to jump to avoid their going over her, though she reached the rock without being actually beyond her depth. The little girl, a child of seven or eight, was nearly exhausted with fright and the effort to keep from being washed off. The boy, who was about ten years old, was in almost as bad a condition. "I'll be back for you," she said to him, taking the girl in her arms. "Let me go, or I can't help either of you." The boy had

grasped her around the neck and was clinging wildly to her. She wrenched his little hands away. "I'll come back at once. Try to be a man." She stepped off, and as a large wave rolled in, held the child high above it while it went over her own head. Returning, it seemed as if it would drag her feet from under her. Then another one. This time she threw herself forward as it came, using its momentum to gain ground. Again she held the child up, again was submerged herself, but when the billow receded they were higher up the ledge. The next wave took them into shallower water, and the remaining few feet were easily made. She laid the child down carefully and entered the water again.

Back some distance two figures appeared, — Ethel and Bertha Wendell.

"Bertha, Bertha," said Ethel, "look there! Do you see that woman? What's she doing?"

Bertha looked, but was too near-sighted to see distinctly.

"There's somebody out there. She's going to them," cried Ethel; and the next moment she was speeding in the woman's direction, Bertha following as quickly as she could.

In the mean time Vida had again reached the rock. She was breathing fast and her temples were throbbing. The boy was much heavier than the girl. As she took him in her arms, she felt the strain in every muscle. She was rapidly losing strength, and could not hold him above the waves. Four went over them both. Instinctively she fought the receding current. Her pulses were beating hard. She saw nothing, felt only a desperate impulse of supreme exertion. Another wave came. It carried them well forward. Somebody clutched her.

"Take him," gasped Vida.

He was lifted from her arms half unconscious; the hand that held her drew her forcibly up the ledge, and then she fell exhausted to the ground.

Vida was a heroine and had not the least idea of it, — a heroine in the very hour of her most humiliating self-analysis.

When Ethel reached the water she had plunged in as im-

petuously as Vida, and just in time. She had unquestionably saved Vida and the child from drowning.

"I'll run to the house and get some brandy," she said. "I'll not be five minutes."

"No," said Vida, feebly. "I don't need it. Why, you're soaked yourself! Was it *you* who helped me?"

"I only caught you as you got in. What a grand thing you've done!" Ethel glowed with enthusiasm.

"It was nothing to do. The boy was heavy, and I was getting tired, that was the only trouble. Are the children all right?"

"Yes," said Bertha, who had been attending to them; "they're very much frightened, that's all!"

Questioning the boy, it was with much difficulty drawn from him that he had gone down to the shore against maternal orders and taken his sister with him. They had climbed onto the rock, and as the tide came in pretended it was a desert island and stayed till the water got too deep for them to return. He was as panic-stricken a young miscreant as ever rued his evil deeds.

"I'm going to take them home," said Bertha; and, having elicited information as to their name and abiding-place, she started off, leading the little girl by the hand, with the boy following close behind.

Vida was by now sufficiently recovered to give attention to her loosened hair, which she was trying to twist up.

"Are you able to walk home yet?" asked Ethel.

"Yes, quite."

"I'm going with you. I sha'n't let you go alone."

"Indeed, you must n't do anything of the kind. You must go and change your own clothes at once."

But Ethel was obdurate, and when Vida had put on her skirt, would accompany her most of the way.

"I'm going to call you Vida," she said as they parted, "and you must call me Ethel."

The adventure they had gone through and the quick respon-

siveness of youth had broken down all formality, and the girls felt thoroughly acquainted.

"Will you feel like coming to tea as you promised?" asked Ethel.

"Yes, indeed; I would n't stay away on any account."

Ethel declined Vida's proposition to go in with her and put on some dry clothes. It was not easy walking in soggy shoes and dripping skirts, but she went along too absorbed in admiration of Vida's heroism to mind personal discomfort.

"Where are you going to, my pretty maid, and what are you pondering so hard?" asked a voice a few feet in front of her. She looked up quickly. "Why, Winfred, is that you? I did n't see you."

It was Winfred Grey, and Clyde Wendell was with him.

"Where in the world have you been?" asked her brother.

She laughed. "Even to a person of the most limited intelligence it must be evident that I've been in the water. I've something magnificent to tell you. Vida Radcliffe has just saved two children's lives."

"Miss Radcliffe!" exclaimed Winfred.

"And she did it all alone. They were on Preacher's Rock, and she brought them both back. She had to go out twice for them."

"But you're wet too. What have you been doing?" asked Clyde.

"I got there just in time to pull her and the boy in. She was about exhausted. Why don't either of you say something? Don't you understand what a splendid thing it was? She held onto the children with every wave going over her own head."

"So there is something in her, after all!" said Winfred.

"What!" ejaculated Ethel, looking at him in surprise.

"Do you object to my knowing there's something in her?"

"But you don't know her at all."

"Oh!"

"Of course you don't. We were speaking of you before her the other day, and *she* did n't know you."

"I suppose you'll allow me to have heard of her, or perhaps even to have seen her."

"Hum! that's different. I must go. Are you coming to tea, Winfred?"

"He says he can't," said Clyde. "Make him change his mind."

"I've been tramping up inspiration all the afternoon," said Winfred; "I must go home and write it down."

"Never mind your inspiration; you've such quantities you can afford to waste some. Vida's coming to tea. I want you to meet her. She's perfectly lovely."

"But so cold and soulless," said Clyde, maliciously.

"That's mean," retorted Ethel. "If a person makes a mistake you need n't flaunt it in her face ever after. Winfred, will you come?"

Winfred looked aggravatingly indifferent. "You want me to abandon my own fascinating heroine of fancy for your realistic clay one?"

"Oh, if you're so very superior to all mankind, no matter how grand it is, you need n't trouble." Ethel was really getting vexed for her new friend.

"I'm simply talking to disguise my eagerness. I'll come and worship at your goddess's feet with the reverence of conscious unworthiness."

"Now you talk as any man should of such a girl. What are you and Clyde doing? I wish you two would keep apart. You're filling the child up with all your extraordinary ideas, and he's too young to stand it. It's unbalancing his mind."

"I do try to keep away from him. He found me poking about the woods and insisted on poking with me and bringing me down here. It's just as well, though. I need followers. I'm going to enlist you some day."

"Very well. I'm nearly ready for it now. At present, as I'm a trifle moist, I'll bid you good-bye." She nodded to them and turned to go. "Don't be late," she called back.

On reaching home, she told the story of Vida's achievement

with such ardor that she wrought the whole house into as high a state of enthusiasm as herself. Vida's welcome that evening promised to be a glowing one.

"This Miss Radcliffe fills me with profound admiration," said Winfred after Ethel had left. "Courage tells even in these days when mind is so much more the fashion than matter."

"It's rather surprising in a girl brought up so artificially. One does n't expect it from that kind of a girl. It's such an impulsive sort of thing to do."

"We're a lot of fools and conceited prigs," said Winfred, "and we're everlastingly astonished when a cold-blooded fact starts up and pulverizes our infallibility. Let's return thanks for Miss Radcliffe. She's an epitomized sermon to the student of humanity."

CHAPTER IX.

VIDA, dried and reclothed, was on her way to the Wendell cottage. She was dressed in a white cloth skirt and jacket, and a pink-and-white-striped silk shirt-waist. Dress in Red Rock was conveniently simple; what were morning or afternoon costumes in other places, there became evening toilets. Vida looked remarkably well. Her gown had upon it the *cachet* which only the exorbitant ladies' tailor can impart, and she wore it with the air that belongs to the *cachet*. Her white ties and big white leghorn hat with pink roses completed the *ensemble*, and she went forth a very *distinguée* girl, perfectly attired.

She was feeling much more at peace with herself and the world. Her adventure had roused her, and she had the prospect of a delightful evening. She stepped along with a free motion acquired during her three weeks' wandering through fields and woods. The cast-iron restraint of the conventional was much less apparent in her carriage and manner. In youth, the higher nature, once aroused, quickly manifests itself externally.

The Wendell cottage was surrounded by considerable foliage, and the drive leading up to it was well shaded, so Vida had no intimation of what was in store for her till, upon reaching the entrance, she was startled by a procession of waving green boughs advancing to meet her. Ethel was at the head carrying a flag, and a cornet, played by Clyde, burst into martial exultation. The procession was made up of the younger Wendell populace, which, giving vent to ringing hurrahs, was exhausting its lungs in vociferous welcome. Vida, laughing but embarrassed, stood protesting, while the cheers rang forth with vigor. She was placed between Ethel and Clyde, and marched up the

drive to the immortal air of "The Conquering Hero." As they reached the house, Mr. Wendell, joining as heartily as any one in the pleasantries of the occasion, took off his hat with the bow of a courtier, then, kissing her hand, in a resonant voice and with assumed stateliness of manner, made a very pretty little speech, in which Vida was entitled Queen of the Ocean and various other mythical dignitaries. Mr. Wendell was a fine-looking old gentleman of sixty-five or more, tall, broad-shouldered, with iron-gray hair and beard, and a strong face, made jovial by a pair of twinkling blue eyes. After the speech he led Vida up the veranda steps with imposing ceremony. Mrs. Wendell, not to omit her part in the play, received her with a benign smile and a profound courtesy.

"Why, where's Winfred?" asked Ethel. "Do you mean to say he didn't go with us? Winfred Grey, where are you?"

Winfred, who, during the whole performance, had carefully remained in obscure retirement, came forward and took off his hat with a sweep that rivalled Mr. Wendell's.

"Will the most radiant and sovereign queen deign to receive the homage of one of her most devotedly admiring subjects? Her majesty once graciously accorded him the inestimable favor of her recognition. Dare he hope that the supreme felicity may be granted him once more?"

It was a bit out of the "romantic drama" of his stage career, and done in the manner of an expert. Vida looked at him in speechless astonishment. The strange man of the Park here! The strange man of the Park Winfred Gray! She stood silent and blushing before him, then recovered herself and held out her hand.

"You are Winfred Grey? I think you might have told me."

The Wendells watched the scene with surprised curiosity.

"What in the world does it all mean?" asked Ethel.

"It's simply a question of identity," answered Winfred.

"I've met Mr. Grey, and never knew it," said Vida.

"Are you travelling about under aliases, Winfred?" asked Harry.

"I don't label myself with a placard."

"Perhaps you've adopted the convict method. Does Miss Radcliffe know you as a number?"

"Miss Radcliffe, shall I explain the situation and stop this fellow's babble?"

"I certainly think one of us ought to explain."

"There's not much to tell," said Winfred. "I was able to be of a little use to Miss Radcliffe once or twice, and it didn't seem necessary on either occasion to mention my name. It would have been entirely too forward, too much in Harry's line."

"A little use!" said Vida. "He knocked a man down the first time, and prevented a frantic mob from trampling me to death the next."

"It's a good thing God's made natural policemen," said Harry, musingly. "They're brutal but indispensable."

"Yes, till impudence is clubbed into good manners," said Winfred.

He and Vida were both plied with questions as to the details of their former meetings, the recital of which aroused great interest. Vida the while pondered over the "strange man's" reappearance, and more over the revelation of his identity. Winfred Grey, the man whose name was on every one's lips, the man whose genius she had thought of as something alarming and to be viewed only from a distance! How stupid she had been not to know him! His words and manner in speaking of his unsuspected self, his familiarity with the stage and intimacy with the actors, his apparent personal interest in the disaster of the fire! Yes, she had been inconceivably dull. She felt a glow of satisfaction that her protector should turn out to be so distinguished a person. Vida was very animated, and showed to her best advantage that evening.

When the servant announced supper, Mr. Wendell drew her hand through his arm and led the way to the *al fresco* dining-

room on the side veranda. It was a most charming place in which to discuss Mrs. Wendell's dainty fare, being so built as to overlook the ocean and at the same time command a view of the western sky and the panorama of summer sunsets. Mr. Wendell placed Vida beside him, and Harry, with obvious directness, started for the chair at her right.

"Miss Radcliffe," said Winfred, "may I sit next to you? I want to save you from the advance sheets of the *Week's Echo*. I see whole pages descending on you." Having the advantage of proximity, he calmly appropriated the seat of Harry's desire. "This time I really have preserved you from a frightful disaster," he said.

"Winfred, why did n't you tell the truth this afternoon?" asked Ethel. "Why did n't you explain about knowing Vida?"

"Because I'm too polite. You insisted that I did n't know her, perhaps you remember."

"But I don't yet understand how you knew her and she did n't know you. How was it, Vida?"

"I have n't the least idea," said Vida.

"It was by one of those extraordinary coincidences that make people fatalists," said Winfred.

"Are you a fatalist?" asked Vida. She began to feel she was. Her constant meeting with him looked as if some spirit of destiny were directing things.

"I am this evening. Fate has been so conspicuously kind this evening I've got to recognize her out of common gratitude." He looked at Vida with obvious meaning in his eyes.

"Are you a fatalist in your writing?" asked Bertha. "I've always wanted to know how you develop your people."

"They grow all by themselves like pig-weed." Winfred was seldom disposed to make his work the subject of conversation.

"I wish you'd answer sensibly," said Bertha, who only asked questions with a definite view to getting information.

"A well-known French writer, I forget which one, swears

he's quite irresponsible for his productions. A little flock of gnomes and sprites come fluttering about his table and operate him, so to speak. All he does is to transcribe obediently what they dictate. I don't know if the gentleman is strictly truthful or not."

"Are you the gentleman in disguise?" asked Clyde.

"No, I'm not. Whatever I write, good or bad, I stand by it as the fruit of my own brain. If I thought we're merely mouthpieces of an intelligence outside ourselves I'd never put pen to paper again. Such a fact would be an insult to our individuality which I'd resent to my last breath."

"All revelation of beauty and truth comes from something outside ourselves, some power greater and better than ourselves," said Gerard, speaking for the first time. "We don't create the revelation. We only appropriate as much of it as our souls can receive."

"Isn't talent and, in a higher degree, genius, an openness of soul to revelation?" asked Margaret.

"And the execution?" said Winfred. "Of two people who realize beauty and truth, who conceive, or if you choose receive, an idea, one is helplessly incapable of doing anything with it. The other clothes it with burning words of fire, paints it in forms and colors of immortal loveliness, sings it in notes of wooing melody. He thrills with it; he labors for it; he breathes life and love into it, and hands it out to the world a gift of godly munificence."

"It all remains a question of how much soul you have," said Gerard. "The executive faculty is only the servant of the soul."

"You're a dreamer as well as a painter, Gerard," said Winfred. "You paint poems more than you paint pictures. I know that's a doubtful compliment from the 'art for art's sake' point of view."

"You're a good deal of a puzzle yourself," said Mr. Wendell. "One critic calls you an uncompromising realist, and another stamps you as the most star-gazing of idealists. I

confess you seem to be a sort of hybrid. In the midst of your most clear-cut realities you exhale a mystic charm, a spirit breath as truly poetic and ethereal as Gerard's softest hazes and tenderest tones."

"What is reality? Thought, emotion, sentiment, aspiration, are as real as threads and needles, hay-stacks and barn-doors, death and corpses, mud and dirt. But the noblest and purest being just as real, just as much part of us as the smallest and vilest, why should Gerard's Psyche in a dell of violets be any more due to revelation than Tom Smith's drunkard over his bottle? Never mind, no one need bother answering, for I'm going to back right down and end up by admitting the divine wonder of inspiration. I for one can't write ten lines without it."

"Now," said Harry, with a sigh, "if you're all quite ready, let's get back to earth again."

"Not while we have such a sky before us," said Mrs. Wendell. "Look, John! Look, children, what a beautiful sunset!"

All eyes turned to see, and all voices broke into a chorus of admiring delight. The whole west was aflame with color. Long, slanting bars of brilliant gold alternated with and blended into others of turquoise and soft gray-blue. Above came a ledge of fleecy, brightly illumined clouds against a dark background showing through them here and there. High up larger and more broken masses hung like floating gold-dust in a sky of azure. Slowly the upper clouds, and then the bars beneath, intensified into a dazzling glow of crimson gorgeousness, softening to the north into delicate streaks and fleece clouds of tenderest rose, which contrasted and intermingled with palest blue. As the mass of color contracted it became still more vivid, while the tints of the upper sky gradually faded, and night closed down slowly upon the earth like a soft gray curtain. The glorious radiance waned to gray toned violet, and then star-studded darkness shut out the day. To the east, across the ocean, a gleam of vapory silver shone in the heavens, grew brighter, wider; then up from behind the dark line of the sea the moon rose slowly, its half-

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circle golden-red against the blackness behind it. Higher it mounted, changing to silvery pallor, casting before it a path of shimmering light over the water as far as the rocks, where the billows broke and sparkled in showering spray.

Every one had grown still under the spell of Nature's evening loveliness. They had left the table and were grouped about the veranda in silent enjoyment of the scene. Gerard, his face instinct with an expression of dreamy abstraction, was seated on the railing at one end of the veranda, which was some six or seven feet from the ground, owing to the slope on which the house was built. His fine profile, with the light from one of the rooms thrown upon it, was distinctly outlined against the dark sky. Some one spoke to him, but he did not hear. Harry, the member of the family least in touch with the soul of the night, picked up a pebble as he sat on the steps and threw it at him, striking him sharply on the cheek. Gerard started, lost his balance, and fell backward over the railing. Every one sprang to their feet. Vida, who was sitting beside Ethel, alone noticed the girl's horrified cry, and saw the deathly whiteness that blanched her cheek. The next instant Ethel was down the steps and round the end of the veranda. Winfred jumped down over the railing. The others pressed to the side, Margaret as speechless and as white as Ethel. Gerard had not been hurt, and stood smiling reassurance at his anxious friends.

"I've a cat-like talent for landing on my feet," he said, "I learned it years ago when I thought of becoming an acrobat instead of a painter. I'm all right."

"Thank God," said Winfred, putting his hand on Gerard's shoulder.

"You're not hurt in the least?" asked Margaret. Her voice was not very steady.

"Not a bit."

"It is n't Harry's fault that you're not killed," said Ethel, with flashing eyes.

"I was an idiot," said Harry. "Gerard, upon my word I don't know what to say."

"It's nothing at all," said Gerard, "any one might have done it. Ethel, don't say anything more. Come down to the rocks with me ; it looks so beautiful." He took her by the hand and led her away. Her pulses beat with quick throbs, along every tense nerve quivered a thrill of fire. Gerard pressed her hand reassuringly as he felt how she trembled. She did not attempt to draw away from him. Into her cheeks came an excited flush and into her eyes a feverish glow. The man who takes opium gets out of it all the wild delight he can while its potent charm lasts. The inevitable after-torture does not restrain him ; he defies it, forgets it.

They climbed over the rocks down to the edge of the water. Once her foot slipped on a loose stone, and he caught her in his arms to save her from falling. If his eyes had not been so filled with the image of another woman even he could not have ignored or misunderstood the intensity of passion that shone in her face. The suddenness of the incident for a moment overcame her self-control.

Both were silent while they stood watching the ocean rippling in the moonlight, while they listened to its murmuring monotone as it softly kissed the rocks and bathed them in its warm, dark flood.

"What a lucky chap I am to have such friends as you all are !" he said after a while. "I'd be a miserable, lonely sort of animal without you."

"We've known you nearly five years."

"Yes, I met you just after my sister died. All the rest had gone, and the world seemed pretty desolate without any one to share it with me. Your mother, every one of you, took me in as you'd take in any unfortunate stray creature, from a lost puppy up."

"We've made a pretty good bargain. You've developed what little grace and serenity you found in us, and in addition you've become a decoration. Your glory gives us a lustre we never could have achieved for ourselves. As an intimate friend of the family you cast a glamour over us that is simply dazzling."

She spoke with her usual brightness, but an acute or attentive observer would have detected something forced, over-excited, about it to-night. Gerard took her flattering banter as he always took praise or compliments. To him the very truest of them were only the kindly but meaningless product of a good-natured impulse. He was entirely unconscious of their ever being spoken seriously.

"I've wanted to talk to you about something for a long time," he said abruptly after another pause. "I want you to tell me exactly how it seems to you, just as my sister would have done."

Ethel shrank back. It was a stab that came without the least warning. Her instinct was too keen not to know what he meant. He was so absorbed in his own thoughts that he did not notice her action.

"It's about — about her — Margaret. I thought it was all worship and reverence till a year ago. Then I began to realize it was something else too. It seems like sacrilege," he added, in a low voice, "like daring to love a saint, a priestess whose very garments no man is fit to touch."

She did not answer him, only stared out at the water. Its ceaseless, shimmering ripple where the moonlight fell upon it made her dizzy.

"Ethel, tell me, tell me truly, just as it seems to you, — does it shock you to think of my daring to love her, love her in the way a man loves the one woman in the world he wants to give his mind and his work, his life and his soul to?"

"Margaret is a woman, not a divinity." Even to her own ears the words sounded harsh, her voice dry and hard. He looked at her in astonishment. Surprise stilled all feeling of resentment he might have felt on Margaret's behalf. He never could feel any on his own.

"You should speak to her, not to me, Gerard," she said more quietly.

"Ah, but you don't understand. If it were any other woman in the universe it would be easier to speak. What have

I, what has any man to offer Margaret that is worthy of her? How can I dare imagine she will care to stoop to me?"

With a quick, impatient movement she brushed back the stray curly locks that fell over her forehead.

"The woman you ask to be your wife would n't have to stoop if she were a princess or an angel. Why do you undervalue yourself so? I've no patience with you."

"I don't undervalue myself. If there's anything good in me, anything true in my work, it's Margaret who's called it into life."

"Then give it back to her, she's ready to take it, to take everything, *everything* you can offer her." She started herself at the sting of bitterness in her tones. "Oh, Gerard, forgive me," she added hastily. "I haven't been a very amiable confidante, have I? But you see it was rather sudden, and—it will all make such a difference. Of course you'll tell her, you'll ask her. I—I pray with all my soul that you—will be happy. There, I can't talk any more about it now."

"I'm a brute not to have thought how you'd feel. You're a dear, sweet sister to me, Ethel. Your brothers have no deeper affection for you than I; you know it."

"Listen, they're coming down. Don't you hear them?"

Harry came first, the rest following close behind him. Then they seated themselves among the rocks and fell to talking and story-telling. Ethel whispered to Bertha that she had a headache, and slipped unnoticed from the circle.

Back to the house she hurried, regardless of the way she went, up to her own room. She locked her door and the stifled agony burst forth. She had cried hot, hopeless tears before, cried till she wondered that the pain in her heart did not kill her. She was very ignorant yet of the possibilities of human endurance.

To calmer temperaments, more superficial or harder characters, the suffering of a sensitive, idealistic, intensely passionate nature appears an extravagance; it has about it something of the melodramatic, the unnecessary, even the reprehensible. In the

unsympathetic narrowness of their own contracted emotional life, they condemn it as the mere eruptive outburst of a weak mind and will, — a surface disturbance that must rapidly die of its own disproportioned violence. They understand nothing of such anguish as was in Ethel's soul, — an awful tempest which sweeps only over intrinsically deep and noble — though perhaps sometimes unbalanced — natures, and never leaves them as it found them.

With hair disordered, eyes burning with an insane light of suffering, hands now clinched, now stretching out in the desperation of hopeless longing, the girl stood in the middle of her room, every pulse throbbing, every nerve quivering, her tears all spent, her wild sobs silent. She was conscious only of one thing, — her torture, — instinctively thinking only one thought, — deliverance. "I shall go wild or I shall die," she said. "If I could die, O God, if I could die!" She clasped her hands and twisted the fingers convulsively together. "What does she know of loving him!" she moaned; "what does she know, what does she know!" She threw her head back and looked up, passionate, despairing appeal in her face; her body grew tense, rigid. "I'll bear it if I can, if I can, but I'm afraid, O God, I'm afraid! No, no, no, help me, help, God help me!" She threw herself on the floor. She lay there still when they all came back, lay there till the morning shed its light of dawn upon sea and shore; then she wearily got up, mechanically took off her clothes, and almost dropped upon the bed, and, from utter exhaustion, fell asleep.

And Gerard said nothing to Margaret yet. Ethel had given no assurance to his reverently hesitating spirit.

CHAPTER X.

WHILE Ethel was facing her baptism of fire alone, the rest of the party lingered late on the rocks, held by the irresistible charm of the evening. To Vida the whole situation was one of delightful, fascinating novelty. It was a circle into which any one would have deemed it a privilege to be received. The conversation ran the gamut, from the lightest badinage to the deepest philosophy. It now sparkled with wit, then grew serious without pedantry, poetic without affectation. Vida was stimulated mentally and morally. It surprised her that she held her own as well as she did among these people whose intellectual life had been so wide. She had never analyzed her own mind, or realized its natural elasticity and strength, the quickness of its perceptions.

It was getting on to eleven o'clock. Mr. Wendell was telling a story to which his audience was listening attentively, for he was an admirable *raconteur*. Harry, early in the evening, had secured a seat next Vida. When Mr. Wendell's narrative was in full progress, and Harry had become as silently interested as everybody else, Winfred quietly got up from his place by Margaret and Gerard and sat down behind Vida. As Mr. Wendell finished the tale with a well worked up climax, and all began commenting upon it, Winfred bent over and spoke to Vida in a low voice.

"Miss Radcliffe, how do you expect to get home? Is anybody coming for you?"

"No, Mrs. Wendell told me she'd send some one with me."

"Will you let me be the some one then?"

"I'll be very glad to if she has n't arranged it any other way."

Vida was quite conscious of hoping she had not, while also hesitating as to the propriety of the proceeding.

"If she has I'll disarrange it, with your permission." He rose without giving her time to object, and went to interview Mrs. Wendell.

Vida soon discovered that, from her standpoint, the Wendell family was more than informal in its freedom from the rules and restraints under which she had been trained. The girls had always claimed and enjoyed a degree of liberty which to the modern much-matronized young woman appeared nothing short of lax, though perhaps at the same time enviable. When some one at last moved to break up the party, and Winfred presented himself as Vida's escort, the thought of chaperonage apparently entered no one's mind. Harry looked crestfallen, and dubbed himself an idiot for being forestalled.

"Would n't you rather go by the shore?" asked Winfred. "It's much pleasanter than the road." It was also much longer.

Vida acquiesced, though feeling distinct qualms as to the decorum of so doing. She bade her friends good-night, and expressed appreciative thanks for the charming evening she had spent.

"Well," said Winfred, looking down at her with a humorous, half-mocking light in his eyes, — "well, we meet again, Miss Radcliffe."

"Why didn't you tell me when I said we were coming here?"

"Have you always a nice, cut-and-dried reason for everything you do?"

"I've no reason at all most of the time. I just do things like animals and children, — because they come into my head."

He laughed. "I've discovered a great virtue in you."

"If you mean it, tell me what it is."

"One of the rarest gems of human nature, — sincerity."

She looked up, pleased and surprised. "Sincerity? I seem to myself to have been playing a part most of my life, and not a very good part at that."

"Has Red Rock been the opening into that new world you were in such a hurry to discover?"

"The gateway into Paradise? I believe it is. You were very kind that night in taking care of me, but in another way you were — you were — not kind at all."

"Then I ought to be kicked," said Winfred.

She was looking up at him with half shy reproach. She was guiltless of conscious coquetry, but dark eyes with long curling lashes take on dangerously soft gleams when appealingly upturned.

"What did I do? Please tell me," begged Winfred.

"You only recognized my general ignorance and stupidity."

"Don't; besides maligning yourself, you're unjust to me." He could not be brutally honest and acquiescent; and, moreover, he had made a mistake.

"And I behaved like a child."

"I like children." The laughter in his voice robbed the words of any possible appearance of presumption.

"You would n't be serious with me then, and you won't be serious now. It's wonderful the way things have happened. If we had n't come here, but gone on, as we always have gone on, — Newport and then home, and then Newport again, and Europe thrown in somewhere, — I could n't have done anything to help myself. But *here!* I wonder how in the world I ever got here!"

"Do you know Burroughs' poem 'Waiting'?"

She shook her head, and he began repeating it to her.

"Serene I fold my hands and wait,
Nor care for wind or tide or sea,
I rave no more 'gainst time or fate,
For lo! mine own shall come to me.

"I stay my haste, I make delays,
For what avails this eager pace?
I stand amid the eternal ways,
And what is mine shall know my face!

"Asleep, awake, by night or day,
The friends I seek are seeking me;
No wind can drive my bark astray
Nor change the tide of destiny.

"What matter if I stand alone? —
I wait with joy the coming years;
My heart shall reap where it has sown
And garner up its fruit of tears.

"The waters know their own and draw
The brook that springs in yonder height;
So flows the good with equal law
Unto the soul of pure delight.

"The stars come nightly to the sky;
The tidal wave unto the sea;
Nor time, nor space, nor deep, nor high,
Can keep my own away from me."

He spoke the verses with the effectiveness of natural dramatic instinct, guided by cultivated art. It was very well done. Vida was stirred and charmed.

"Is it true?" she asked.

"Yes."

"It's very beautiful." Then she was silent for a while, thinking, feeling.

"What a night!" he said. "Did you ever see a brighter moon? And how softly the breeze is blowing! Shall I read your thoughts, Miss Radcliffe, and will you tell me if I read them right?"

"I believe you have some sort of sorcery to read people's thoughts. Try if you like."

"You feel through every nerve the spell of the night's beauty, and you have a sense of freedom, — a fuller, stronger sense than you've ever experienced before. You've been brought up to respect most profoundly the proprieties, and here you are flying in the face of every one of them. It's a

peculiar thing — you doubt, even with Mrs. Wendell's sanction, if it's a right thing — to be leisurely strolling through all this wealth of midnight loveliness. But whether it's peculiar or not, it's exhilarating to step over the limits that have constrained your liberty, and break loose from the chains of rule and form. You're startled, you're half frightened, but you breathe the vital air of freedom and you like it."

"Yes," said Vida, with sudden passion, "and the rules can never hold me again as they used to."

"Rules, customs, even sensible prudence are useless barriers against the law that governs a soul's growth. Confronted with some necessity of its life, they crumble into nothing, and the soul gets what it needs." He stopped and stretched out his arms. "Freedom! It's the one cry breaking from the lips of protesting bondage. We want freedom, — freedom from forms, from creeds, from moral and social tyranny."

He was serious enough now, and there was a grandeur about him such as Vida had never before come in contact with. The abandon of his manner, the proud lack of false diffidence in expressing his thought or emotion were striking and unusual. He looked like a god; he spoke with the power of a vicegerent or some omnipotent authority.

"Most people dwarf themselves because others are content to be stunted and shrivelled manikins. Now and then one breaks through the slavery of petty rules and stands a law unto himself. Very few dare, and very few are yet fitted for it; they've got to grow up to it."

Vida drew a long deep breath. It all looked so far away from her. Yet she thrilled with an ardent longing to achieve this life so wide and strong and grand. "I want to know more, to understand better," she said. "Do you think I ever can?"

"There are capacities in your nature which you've only begun to sound."

She felt a throb of intense delight at his words.

"Have you learned the secret of the ocean and woods and

fields yet?" he asked, smiling down at her very much as he would at a child, — with the same half playful, half tender consideration.

In some respects Vida had always seemed rather older than her years. Her life had developed in her an accurate knowledge of the society phase of existence, and she had very early shown the ease of manner which distinguishes the woman born and bred to her position. She was quite confident of herself within the limits of her narrow and one-sided experience, but placed among the new and unknown surroundings of Red Rock she felt more like the little girl Winfred Grey seemed at times to consider her.

She knit her brow at his question. "What do you mean? I only half understand you; you speak in so many riddles."

"I'll tell you how to find the answer. Go out and sit alone by the sea. Go out into the deep, still forest; lie down on the soft mouldering leaves and listen; try and hear what the voices of the woods are saying. Go out into the storm, and let your heart throb responsively to the might, the majesty, the awful grandeur of Nature's unloosed powers. Go out into the sunlight and the brightness; doze, dreaming, under the caress of summer's warm, loving hand. Go out at night when the moon is risen. Let her pale, mystic light flood brain and heart and soul. Go out when the stars are shining and look way beyond what the sense vision sees, off as far as the imagination can reach through the endless world-studded stretches of space. Read for yourself into the great book of Creation's marvels."

Few men could safely have allowed themselves Winfred's luxuriance of language. He was strong enough to dare what in a weaker man would have been extravagant, or even absurd. There was also a certain pictorial quality about him that gave to his eloquence and flights of fancy a sort of artistically logical propriety. And apart from everything else the conditions of the hour were excuse enough for almost any poetic excess, — midnight, moonlight, and a beautiful girl with eyes full of interest and appeal.

Vida felt the spell of his strong, attractive personality to a degree that stilled and completely fascinated her. Among a circle of people Winfred was brilliant, yet never egotistic; he was unaggressive, yet dominated everybody. During the evening Vida had noticed his marked ascendancy. At the same time his unassuming bearing had made her feel quite at ease with him. She felt at ease still, but her confidence was no longer that of a woman of the world. It was more like the appealing trust of a child suddenly transported into an enchanting but confusing environment. Out here among the rocks, in the midst of the weird beauty of the moonlit scene, in the palpitating solitude of the deep night stillness, inspired with poetry of thought and speech, he seemed to have stepped from the sphere of waking realities back into the dream-land of mystery and romance, — the land in which, to her, he had always seemed to belong. And out here alone with her there entered into his manner another element, aroused by the man's protective impulse towards the woman. With him the instinct was very strong. She had felt it in the Park, and the night of the fire; but there was something added to it now, — something more personal. She was half magnetized by the delicious influence which she felt stealing over her.

Watching her fair, eager face, he saw he had touched a side of her nature which perhaps few even recognized, — a side of idealism and subtle sensibilities. The temptation to stir this nature more deeply, and make it vibrate yet more responsively, was great. He disguised the motive, even from himself, under the aspect of his humanitarianism.

"Miss Radcliffe," he said, "there's another life than this life in Nature's blue-domed treasure-garden; there's another life too than the one of rose-leaf softness and gaslight brilliance. It's lived in a world where people suffer and sin and starve and struggle, where they rave against man and God, where women faint over the needle that sews your lace, and men grow brutal turning the mills that grind the flour for the dainty white bread you eat. Do you want really to learn?" He asked it with

something of pity in his voice. She comprehended but little what was involved in learning. "Do you want really to *know*? If so, do you understand that you must know this world too, and that when you know it you cannot go away and forget it, lying down on the rose-leaves once more, or standing apart like a beautiful hot-house flower under the gaslight glow?"

"No, no, no, I do want to learn it, I want to learn it *all*. Will you teach me?"

The eagerness with which she spoke made him realize that he was going too fast and too far. "I can't pilot myself, much less any one else," he answered. "Some day you'll find somebody who practises what he preaches, and then you'll discover what a fraud the other kind is, — the kind that stops, dead-locked, at the preaching."

Rounding a curve of the shore, a light came into view a little distance ahead of them.

"There's your house," he said. "In two minutes I'll have to bid you good-night, and only Dame Fortune knows when I'll see you again." Vida looked up quickly. "I'd ask you to let me call," he said, "but — it's one of the mean tricks of circumstances that I can't."

"Why can't you? That's very queer. Of course I should like you to come very much."

"I might as well make a clean breast of it. I know your father — slightly; I met him once, and it was my bad luck, as it now turns out, to make a very unpleasant impression on him. In fact, I'll confess that he'd prefer a Zulu to accompany you home rather than I. Of course I'd no business to do it, but I'm so pitifully weak I succumbed to temptation without even trying to resist."

"Oh, Mr. Grey," said Vida, "is it really true?"

"Which, the first or the last proposition? They both are as true as man's infirmities."

"Then I can't see you at all?"

"You may have to *see* me if I happen to come before your

line of vision at the Wendells', or perhaps somewhere on the high road, or down on the rocks ; but I'll efface myself from the picture as hastily as possible, if you wish."

"What was it about ? What was the trouble ?"

"Ah ! that is a profound secret. If you ask your father, he'll tell you I was offensive, insulting, and deserve severe chastisement of a corporal nature, possibly I may merit shooting or even hanging. But it's no joke, Miss Radcliffe, for I am indeed most sorry to be debarred from the honor and pleasure of your acquaintance."

"You've twice done me a service —"

He stopped her with a gesture. "I can't accept any grace on that score," he said proudly.

"But I can't forget it ; I can't forget the kindness and courtesy you showed me. Whatever the trouble is between you and my father, it does n't cancel my obligations to you, or make me the least bit less grateful to you. Of course we shall meet in the same way we've met to-day."

"Thank you. Gratitude is a truly divine quality. I'm vulnerable, and surrender."

They were at the gate now. Wisdom forbade his going any further.

"I want to give you a reference of my character," he said. "Your Cousin Tom is one of my best friends."

"Cousin Tom !" She looked up with surprise and unmistakable delight. "Cousin Tom is your friend ! I'm so glad !"

"And I'm so glad he's *your* Cousin Tom. Thank you very much for letting me come home with you."

She held out her hand to him. "Good-night, Mr. Grey. I can't tell you how much bigger you've made the world seem to me. I've that to thank *you* for besides the other things."

"Good-night. May your bright new dreams all blossom into brighter realities."

He stood at the gate and watched her go up the path till she reached the house. She turned, moved by the silent influence of his thought or presence. He raised his hat. "Good-night," he said again. "Good-night," she answered, and then he went on down the road.

As she put out her hand to ring the bell, some one opened the door from the inside, and Cousin Tom bustled out to meet her.

"What a lovely surprise!" she cried. "When did you come?"

"This evening, while you were away. Everybody's gone to bed, but I stayed up to see you. Why, my dear, how bewilderingly sweet you look! Before you go upstairs sit down and give an account of yourself."

"To begin with I *like Red Rock*. I would n't be anywhere else for the world. I know the Wendells now, and they're simply delightful. And, Cousin Tom, why did n't you tell me you know Mr. Grey, — Winfred Grey?"

"So you've met the villain, the miscreant! I'm sorry for it."

"What do you mean?" She gazed at him with wide-eyed surprise and anxiety. "He said you're one of his best friends."

"Well, I'm not. I was once, and should be yet, if he had n't behaved like an uncivilized Hottentot. He may go to the dev — Excuse me, my dear, I beg your pardon."

"He told me about a difficulty with papa. It was he who was in the wrong then?" She was quite unconscious of betraying the fact that she had assigned the position to her parent.

"Your father! I don't know anything about your father."

"Then *what* are you talking of, Cousin Tom?"

"He knows your father!" An expression of sudden enlightenment had come into his face. "He knows your father! Um — hum! Tell me what he said about him."

Vida repeated all Winfred had told her, and also the story of

her own adventures with him. During the recital Tom Ives looked more and more sagacious.

"Te-tum, te-tum, te-tum!" he said as she finished. "That accounts for the whole business. But I'd like to know what he's been up to. Vida, do you like my friend Mr. Grey?"

"Very much." She looked down, evidently troubled. "What do you suppose it was between him and papa?"

"Heaven only knows! I had no idea they'd even met."

"It's a great pity; I'm so sorry."

"It's a confounded shame! My dear, Winfred's a cyclone when he gets started, and — well, your father, in certain circumstances, is splendidly calculated to set him in full operation. It's too bad, too bad!"

There was a pause; then, "Cousin Tom," said Vida, "I don't believe it was Mr. Grey's fault." She spoke the words slowly.

"Eh — ah — um, deuce take it! I don't believe so either."

She raised her eyes to his. Neither of them added another syllable, but the silence was eloquent.

"You have n't explained yet why you've never spoken of him."

"I don't bore you with a list of my friends. Winfred's made his public reputation within the last three years, while I was in Europe. You would n't have been interested in him before."

"Of course I should have been," she spoke with considerable warmth. "But why have n't you said anything since you came back?"

"That's only six weeks ago, just after the cosmopolitan fire. I did n't want to allude to anything or anybody connected with the subject, — not till you were over the shock. And to think of his being the man, and keeping as mum about it as an oyster! He has more nonsensical crotchets than the weather-bureau! So you like him, Vida?"

"He said you'd give him a character, Cousin Tom."

"A character! The Almighty's given him one of the most perverse, grandest characters man was ever born with. But he needs chastening and taming. If he'd fall in love and have enough preliminary misery mixed up with it, he'd come out pretty near perfect."

"How do you know he has n't been in love already?"

"Bah! He's a woman-worshipper in the abstract, just as your Cousin Tom is. But he's never settled down to an individual angel. He says he has n't had time; he's worked too hard."

Then, it being after twelve, Vida and Cousin Tom went to bed, while the woman-worshipper, haunted by a pair of big, brown, questioning eyes, walked slowly and musingly home. He rather wondered at the extent of his interest in this beautiful girl whom it had twice fallen to his lot to protect and then forget. Even the unusual and romantic nature of their experience together had not imbued her with any attraction for him, — the veneer of her artificiality had been too strikingly in evidence, and the artificial always antagonized him. Now so much of this had already disappeared that he had seen the natural woman beneath, and heard her warm, quick heart-beats. There had been revealed an undeveloped richness of soul which had a singular charm for him. He intended to watch this soul expand and bud and blossom. He pondered what yet hidden sweetness and strength it would unfold.

CHAPTER XI.

THE next day dawned bright and balmy. Red Rock was having a continuance of exceptionally fine July weather, warm and sunny but tempered by the coolest of sea-breezes.

It was early in the morning, not more than ten o'clock. Aunt Georgiana was just getting up. She always breakfasted in bed, for sanitary reasons, she said. Clara had disappeared with a girl called Clarke, in whom she had most blessedly found a companion. Cousin Tom, immediately after breakfast, had taken a horse and started in the road-wagon to see Winfred. Vida was sitting in a hammock on the veranda with her morning's mail unopened in her lap. She had not slept much during the night, but had lain awake thinking over the incidents of the evening, floating along in a half mystic reminiscence of her walk home with Winfred. It seemed a veritable miracle that events should have so shaped themselves as to bring her here to Red Rock in direct contact with Winfred, when, according to all precedent, Newport and its monotonous gayeties should have been her fate. The fascination of his personality, the glamour of his genius and reputation, dazzled her. She felt an intense admiration for all those qualities which so strikingly distinguished him from the type of men she was accustomed to, — men for the most part of average intelligence and commonplace pursuits, material in tastes and habits, and generally more or less dissipated. His attentions during the evening undoubtedly flattered her vanity, but they also did much more. Other men's attentions she was accustomed to accept as a matter of course, never dreaming of making any special effort to gain or hold them, and being perfectly indifferent to the opinions and even feelings of the individual offering them.

Winfred was the first man whose regard she was unfeignedly desirous of winning; and his manifest interest in her added wings of flame to her new-born aspirations. Expansion, knowledge, were no longer the unattainable objects of a vague wish; they were necessities of her existence. There intruded upon her a disturbing thought which had remained in the background the previous night. Sooner or later her father would learn of Mr. Grey's presence in the vicinity and of her acquaintance with him. Then what would happen? Would she be forbidden to speak to him, and forced to break off all intercourse with the Wendells so as to run no risk of meeting him? Both contingencies were extremely likely. In the mean time was it wrong to act in direct opposition to what unquestionably would be her father's wishes? She compressed her lips, and the steely look came into her eyes. He had no right to deprive her of advantages which she so needed and craved. Then she thought of Mabel and Julian. When they came back, they would interfere wofully with all her new ideas and plans. One of the letters in her lap was from Mabel. She took it up dreading lest it should say that her sister was not enjoying herself and intended to return. She sighed with infinite relief upon reading that the young woman was having "a very good time, though Dora Grinnell was stupider and sillier than ever." There was a letter from her intimate friend Bess Huntington. Bess also was having a good time, and wanted Vida to pay her a visit at Bay Shore in a week or two. She would write again and fix the time definitely. Before Vida left town it had been settled that this visit should be part of the summer's programme, and she wondered what excuse could be found for getting out of it. And how could she evade asking Bess to Red Rock? Bess's epistle contained a budget of news brightly written, and betraying astute insight into their world and knowledge of its inhabitants. Vida laughed once or twice at her friend's wit, but somehow the flavor of the letter was not pleasant. She had never enjoyed one of Bess's communications so little. It seemed singularly flippant. What would Bess think of Winfred,

and what would Winfred think of Bess? She was not a pretty girl, but men — the kind of men belonging to their circle — always liked her. She had style and dash, and was unusually entertaining. But Vida felt she would not have Winfred meet her for worlds, and also would not care to have the Wendells meet her. She realized very clearly some essential differences between Bess and her new friends, — differences by no means to the advantage of the former. As she sat uneasily pondering them, Ethel appeared at the gate, and roused her from her reverie by a cherry good-morning. With a sense of great relief, Vida bundled up her letters, consigned Bess and her shortcomings to temporary oblivion, and greeted Ethel with genuine pleasure.

"I've a plan on hand," said Ethel; "do say you'll go; do please say right off you'll go."

"Go where?" asked Vida, ready for almost anything, her animal spirits being in a state of healthy activity.

"To the Greys. I told Winfred to tell his mother and sister I'd be over some day this week."

"Why, I can't," said Vida, drawing back with suddenly checked ardor. "I don't know them."

"That does n't matter; it's all right for you to go with me. They'll be delighted to see you."

"But Mr. Grey would think it very queer."

"Winfred? Indeed he won't. Why should he? Vida dear, please go. I must do something, move about, go somewhere." Then Vida became conscious that Ethel's eyes shone with abnormal brightness, and that she spoke in quick, nervous accents.

"I can't stay about the house; I'll go crazy if I do, and — and I can't be alone." The suppressed excitement in her manner was very apparent, and Vida saw plainly that something was wrong; yet she still hesitated. If she went, it would look like deliberately seeking Winfred, — to put it bluntly, calling upon him as he could not call upon her. She could not place herself in such a position.

"You don't want to, do you?" said Ethel, betraying a dis-

appointment she tried to hide, but for an instant such a look came into her face, a look almost of despair, that Vida was startled. Ethel noticed it, and broke into a forced laugh. "I get like this sometimes," she said; "I did n't sleep well last night, and altogether I've been behaving ridiculously. It's nerves. Nerves are dreadful things; people never had them till this nineteenth century of madness." Then the girl suddenly put her head down on Vida's shoulder, and pressed her face against her. It was only for a second. Before Vida could think of anything to say, she raised herself again, and when she spoke it was in a quiet voice.

"It's a beautiful world we have, is n't it? One ought to be satisfied with it alone, ought n't one? Just look at that sky and sea, — such soft, sleepy white clouds and such sparkling, cool, blue water! Let's do something else, if you don't want to go to the Greys."

"It is n't that I don't want to; it's only — I was afraid of intruding; but it was probably very foolish, so we'll go."

"Oh, Vida, how good you are! I *am* so much obliged to you!" She spoke with an earnestness that seemed quite out of proportion to the occasion.

"Did you intend to walk?" asked Vida.

"Is it too far for you? Bertha and Clyde have taken our one horse and wagon."

"It is n't too far, but it'll be pretty hot. We can have the phaeton if you like."

"That'll be fine. And Vida, I'll behave myself much better after we get started. It always does nerves good to be going somewhere."

"I'll order the carriage," said Vida; "I'll be back in two minutes."

What had happened to Ethel? Surely something unusual. Her condition Vida felt sure was connected with the occurrences of the previous night. She remembered her agitation when Gerard had fallen, and thought of her disappearance from their circle on the rocks. There was no doubt about it, Ethel loved

Gerard. "And he loves Margaret," murmured Vida. Love? Was this what it meant? Could she ever feel it so, ever suffer and break her heart because of it? She shrank at the answer in her soul: it was a feeling, intense, passionate, rather than a thought. She had never had such a feeling before. Vida believed she had often been utterly wretched, especially of late, as wretched as a mortal can be; now a dim consciousness of suffering which transcended by infinite degree all she knew or had imagined stirred her painfully. For the second time in her life — the occasion of her scene with Frank Vaughn was the first — she felt the throb of a sorrow not her own.

Ethel talked incessantly during the drive to Meadbrook. As soon as they started, she began telling Vida about the Greys. "Old Mr. Grey's a splendid old man," she said. "Winfred looks very much like him. He's over seventy, and he can't be made to believe he has such a wonderful son. And you'll love sweet old Mrs. Grey the minute you see her."

Vida felt jarred. After a woman has begun to take an active interest in a man whom she has only known detached from his family, of which he has never spoken, it is always disturbing when the family is first brought into evidence. She has unconsciously regarded him as a unique being, entirely free from the common ties of life. The sudden realization that persons exist having claims upon his affections and attention is apt to be unsettling, and not altogether agreeable, — that is, if the interest is decisive enough. But disturbing as was Ethel's first piece of information, the second was still more so. It gave Miss Radcliffe a shock which made her change color. The narrow and, in truth, snobbish feeling she experienced always remained one of her sorest and most humiliating memories, — after she had evolved beyond possibility of its recurrence.

"They're farmers," said Ethel, — "old New England farmers, and they have been for generations."

Farmers! Winfred Grey, this man so brilliant, so exceptional in every way, a farmer's son! To be sure all kinds of people might be called Grey; but there were excellent families

of the name, and she had taken it for granted that his was one of them. Doubt as to his birth and social position had never occurred to her. She thought of the unusual refinement and polish of his manner. He had charmed her as he did all women by his courtesy. The word farmer conveyed to her mind the idea of a coarse, uneducated person who hoed potatoes and dined in his shirt-sleeves. She was entirely ignorant of the respected lineage and status boasted by many New England farmers. Her inbred class-instincts were rudely shaken into conflict with all the admiration and interest which Winfred had awakened in her, the feeling of childlike familiarity with which she had begun to regard him. The moment had in it veritable pain.

"You know about Mrs. Grey?" asked Ethel, who had observed nothing of the effect which she had produced.

"No, what about her?"

"She's blind; she's been so for fifteen years."

"How dreadful! Is she very unhappy?"

"No, as cheerful as if being blind were pleasant. She's as simple-minded as a child, and so good. Now Margaret's good in a different way. I can't explain it; but Margaret seems good from principle, and Mrs. Grey's good without having to think of principle; and then she's so calm and peaceful."

"They say blind people are often like that."

"Yes, I know," a strained look came into her face. "Do you think being blind is the worst thing that can happen to a person, harder to bear than anything else in the world?"

Vida glanced at Ethel wistfully; the thought underlying the girl's words was so plain.

"I don't know," said Vida, slowly. "Think of the darkness, — the awful, endless darkness. If a person can bear that, I should think she could bear anything."

"Perhaps," said Ethel. "Yes, it must be terrible. I suppose it'll seem queer to you, but Margaret and I go sometimes to the Salvation Army meetings. There's a great deal that's ridiculous and fanatical about these people, but they have the same thing Mrs. Grey has."

"What do you mean? — I don't understand."

"You would if you noticed them. One can't describe it — the look in their faces. It's a wonderful look. Certain kinds of religious people all have it."

Vida sighed. Ethel's manner and tone saddened her, and she was glad when the subject was changed. A warm feeling of friendship was rapidly being cemented between the girls. They told each other of their different aims and pursuits. Ethel, who was exceedingly talented, had determined to make art her life-work, and devoted herself to it assiduously. She was already a member of the Water Color Society, and had had pictures hung on the line in some of the best exhibitions. Vida frankly admitted the narrowness and triviality of her own existence, and her growing dissatisfaction with all that had hitherto made up the sum of her desires. She even found herself consulting Ethel as to the educational literature she wished to procure, and received some very sensible advice on the subject. But underlying Ethel's manner the element of feverish restlessness was always present.

"There's the farm," she said, after they had been driving about twenty minutes. "That house on the hill."

"Yes, I see." Vida hesitated a moment. "It — it seems very queer that Mr. Grey's people should be farmers," she said. The thought had been rankling in her mind all the way.

"Our New England farmers have given the country some of its greatest men," said Ethel.

"Are there any children besides Mr. Winfred Grey?"

"One, a sister."

"Is she older or younger than he?"

"She's older; she must be over forty."

"What is she like? Is she very — very plain, and like farm people generally?"

"You mean is she uncultivated? Indeed, she's very far from it, as far as Winfred himself. I don't believe you can know much about our best class of New England farmers.

Miss Kate's one of the grandest women on earth, and one of the loveliest, too; but she's a little reserved till you know her. There, now you can see the house better."

It was a quaint, old-fashioned frame-dwelling, with high gambrel roof and colonial doors and windows. Colonel Hiram Grey had built it more than a hundred years before, after the last gun of the Revolution had set him free to attend to family matters again. His descendants had lived under its shelter ever since, and prospered, as farmers count prosperity. They were never rich, but, being of thrifty Puritan stock, had maintained an even and reasonable degree of well-being. They had sent many sons and daughters out into the world who, with few exceptions, had done them credit, some in high, some in lowly places. Inter-marriage with a more pliable element from southern parts of the country — from Virginia and from Georgia and the Carolinas — had toned down the prim austerity of the early Greys, and imparted to their later offspring some southern warmth and passion. The combination of qualities produced many excellent results, Winfred being its culminating triumph. All this Ethel related as the girls approached the house; and Vida's reluctance to making the call began to reassert itself with doubled energy. Why had she let herself be persuaded into it!

"I suppose Cousin Tom's here," she said, nervously. "He'll be surprised to see me."

Cousin Tom had been there half an hour, and at that moment was in the full tide of dispute with Winfred. The two men were sitting in Winfred's study, from which point of view the road was plainly visible.

"I'm sorry for it, my dear Ives," Winfred was saying, "but your millionaire cousin-in-law is an infernal rascal. I've told the facts just as they occurred. Pshaw! No man makes fifteen or twenty millions humanely and honestly. What's the use of talking? You know it."

"Of course you had to protect Mrs. Dinsmore; but is it your business to go about waving a red flag in the face of every financial bull you come across?"

"It's very foolish any way, but when a man has such a chance he's got to be as cold-blooded as a jelly-fish to miss it."

"I don't care that about Radcliffe personally," Tom Ives snapped his fingers in the air, "but I'm disgusted that you're shut out of the house. Here you are living next door to this little girl of mine, and it's natural that you should know her."

"Well, I do know her."

"Yes, yes, yes; I mean see her and meet her, and all that sort of thing. It's too bad, too bad!"

"She seems a very nice girl," said Winfred, nonchalantly.

"Nice! Confound it, you're a mollusk, a conceited, priggish piece of flabbiness!"

"Hollo!" cried Winfred, springing up from his seat near the window, "by the gods, I hear the rustle of her wings now. Look, you human dynamite factory!"

Cousin Tom quickly arose and looked out. "Well, upon my soul!" he ejaculated, "what is she doing here?"

"That's Ethel Wendell with her. She's come to call on Kate."

He stood silent a moment, watching the phaeton approach. "She's the most beautiful girl I've ever seen," he said, with all the ardor his companion could desire. "Come, we'll go and help them out." He hurried from the room, ran down the narrow flight of stairs, and stepped onto the porch just as the girls drove up. He stood in the sunlight with bare head. His hair was rumpled, and his tie had come undone, — a disordered condition of which he was quite unconscious. He looked unmistakably pleased, and did not attempt to disguise it; but, nevertheless, Vida wished with all her heart that she had never come. Her act stood out before her in bold relief, undignified and unmaidenly past redemption. He helped Ethel from the carriage and then held out his hand to Vida.

"I don't think I can get out," she said, "the horse won't stand."

"He'll have to, in the barn," he answered, taking the reins

from her while she looked at him, and, with a woman's quickness of perception, noted again all the mingled grace and nobility, strength and charm of this strange man's personality. How could such a man be only a farmer's son? Then the reckless thought came to her — reckless from a Radcliffe point of view: What difference does his father make? Like a god, heaven-born, he is sufficient in and of himself. She gathered courage to meet his eyes and answer his smile, and then felt how remote from his mind was any criticism of her coming. Self-consciousness departed and, putting her hand in his, she accepted the situation and got out.

"Mother's in the sitting-room," he said to Ethel; "go right in, won't you, and take Miss Radcliffe with you. I'll put up the horse, and then I'll find Kate."

"Come," said Ethel, passing her hand through Vida's arm, "this is the way."

CHAPTER XII.

AN old farm is a very interesting feature of civilization. It is something to study and to ruminate upon. Through the long years of a calm existence it has gathered unto itself, summer after summer, the cheer of all beneficent sunshine that has brightened it, the sweetness of warm, flower-scented evenings, the orderly activity of busy, uneventful days. It has gathered, winter after winter, the strength of storms resisted, and the restfulness of long, dark nights. It has acquired a peculiar atmosphere, and taken on a distinctive character. An old farm is always pictorially satisfactory. It always has worn stone slabs before the doors, a queer pump or well prominently visible; it has irregularities of outline which, while betraying more or less decrepitude, are artistically invaluable. The wood-shed, just beyond the kitchen, for convenience sake, is sure to be interestingly heterogeneous in the matter of contents, to have more articles dangling in full view from the roof inside than less ancient wood-sheds tolerate. There are always grand old oaks and elms spreading wide, protecting arms above, and murmuring soft whispers to its eaves. Hill Top Farm—an unimaginative appellation suggested by its locality—Hill Top Farm, in addition to the attractions common to other abodes of the same class, enjoyed the advantage of rarely tasteful treatment. At some period of its history a nature and comfort loving Grey had added to the original structure a wing with a very wide covered piazza built even with the ground. The piazza lent itself particularly well to decorative purposes, and had been greatly utilized by Winfred, who, with his eye for possible effects, had added a hundredfold to the natural charms of the house. All desecrating paint was denied its venerable age, its weather-

worn boards being left artistically gray, and then made brilliant with a luxuriance of flowers and vines. Honeysuckle and nasturtium vines trailed over a wire netting and almost enclosed the piazza, leaving an opening for exit and entrance, and spaces to catch the wide view of rolling fields and stretches of wooded hills. Vines climbed over the narrow porch and half hid the old pump standing before the kitchen door; hollyhocks, rose-bushes, sunflowers, variegated phlox, sweet peas, marigolds, a whole host of country blossoms, grew against the sides of the house, against the fences, and down the walk. There were no disfiguring beds of conventional stiffness, only a tangle of floral profusion whose art was concealed by its apparent carelessness. Vida, looking about her, uttered an exclamation of delight.

"Is n't it pretty?" asked Ethel.

"It's fascinating," said Vida, following Ethel around to the wing with the piazza.

A door led directly from the piazza into the sitting-room. The door was wide open, letting in the sweet odor of the flowers; the sun, shining through white curtains and half-closed blinds, fell across the floor and filled the room with a softened glow of warmth and brightness. It was a low-ceiled, wainscoted room, papered in a flowery pattern which harmonized with its antique character. There was a wide fireplace with andirons and a crane, and a stone wood-box was built into the wall beside the fireplace. The mantles shelf was high and narrow, practically useless except for a race of people as tall as its Puritan contrivers. The old family clock had its place in one corner, and old, brass-ornamented mahogany furniture stood against the walls,—genuine and solid as its original straight-backed, stiff-minded owners, the colonial Greys. Sitting by one of the windows, in a rocking-chair made easy with cushions, was the sweetest vision—snowy-haired and lovely—that Vida had ever seen,—Winfred's blind mother. A piece of knitting lay in her lap as though she had been working. Her hands lightly clasped the arms of the chair, her head was turned to the window, and her wide-open gray eyes—eyes strikingly like Winfred's—seemed

at first to be gazing at the hilly, sun-bathed landscape lying before her. But the fixed stare never changed; the pupils never moved, even when a ray of sunlight crept over the lace cap covering the pretty white hair, over her cheek, fine-skinned as a child's and delicately pink, right into the open eyes. Her expression, so luminously peaceful, might have been that of one entranced by strains of heavenly music and spirit songs too fine for grosser ears to catch. The girls paused, as one hesitates on the threshold of a shrine, then they entered softly. The old lady turned her head with an inquiring look. She recognized strange footsteps. The next instant a quick welcome flashed into her face.

"Ethel!" she said, rising, and turning to them with pretty, old-time ceremony, "you've come to see me? It's very good in you. But who's with you, dear?"

"Some one I want you to be fond of, Mrs. Grey," said Ethel, kissing her on the cheek. "Vida Radcliffe, my new friend."

"I'm very glad to meet you, my dear," she said, taking Vida's hand in one of hers, and laying the other over it. "Sit down, both of you, and I'll go and call Kate."

"Don't disturb yourself, Mrs. Grey; Winfred's gone for her," said Ethel.

"You've seen Winfred then? Does Miss Radcliffe know my boy?"

"Yes, I know him," said Vida, then she stood almost awkwardly silent. It was difficult to adjust herself at once to his relatives, forced upon her now as existent facts. And in this scene of his daily life Winfred himself appeared in a new light. The etherealized personage of poetic situations became a more human reality, — a man of flesh and blood instead of an abstract collection of lofty virtues and talents without local habitation.

"Mr. Ives is Vida's cousin," said Ethel, who had often heard of the little gentleman, and knew his high standing in the Grey family.

"Do tell!" said the old lady, with pleased surprise; and then the ice of formality broke away completely, though in fact there was very little to break, Mrs. Grey being one of those simple souls who can never be stiff in any circumstances, and are always given to sweet hospitality.

"Tell me, my dear, how well do you know my boy?" she asked.

The simple question moved Vida strangely. Perhaps it was because of the lingering tenderness in the voice, and the light of love that illumined the placid face of the questioner. Somehow it was not very easy to talk to his mother about Winfred; but once more she went over the story of their various experiences together, and Mrs. Grey heard it with a delight that wreathed her face in smiles. Vida felt she would like to put her arms around her and kiss her soft cheek as Ethel had done. The old lady made her draw her chair near so that she could touch her sometimes as she talked, a way she had with any one sympathetic to her. She sat listening and questioning, and listening again, till, in a few minutes, Winfred came in, followed by Cousin Tom, a dog, and a strange little figure, half young girl and half child. The girl was Peggy Dinsmore and the dog, the white deerhound, Siegfried.

"Kate's in the middle of butter-making," said Winfred, "and I can't find father anywhere. It would take one man's whole time to keep track of him, he's so inconsiderately energetic."

"He's up to the meadows most like," said his mother. "They're mowing to-day. I guess he'll be back pretty soon." Then she touched Vida caressingly. Winfred noticed the action with a smile.

"She's told me all about the man in the Park and about the fire," said Mrs. Grey. "She's going to be one of my girls like the rest,—Ethel and Margaret and Bertha—and Peggy," she added, raising her head as though suddenly conscious of the child's presence.

"Peggy," said Winfred, drawing her to him, "go and

speaking to Miss Radcliffe. Miss Radcliffe, Peggy's my caretaker and general supervisor of ideas and manuscripts. She's come to pay us a visit and get browned into a little country girl."

Peggy turned her strange amber eyes to Vida, then looked at Winfred. "Miss Radcliffe?" she said with a surprised, puzzled expression, and seemed about to add something, but she caught a look from Winfred, scarcely perceptible, unnoticed by any one else, and without another word walked up to Vida and held out her hand.

"Mr. Grey is fortunate in having such a good little housewife," said Vida, speaking as she would to any child, but immediately seeing her mistake.

"He could n't possibly get along without me," answered Peggy, calmly and seriously. "He needs a great many things done besides keeping the place in order, — there are the people to see, letters to answer, his work to criticise, facts to find out so that he won't write nonsense and spoil his books. I look them up for him — the facts. There are a great many things to be done. Sieg, keep your paws off Miss Radcliffe's dress. You *know* you're not allowed to rub yourself on people like that."

"I don't mind his paws. Isn't he beautiful? Is he your dog, Peggy?"

"No, he is n't mine, he's Mr. Grey's; but I have to look after his manners. Mr. Grey has n't time. You may stay, Sieg, as the lady does n't object."

"Peggy," said Winfred, "can't you go and attend to the butter and let Miss Kate off?"

"Of course I can; I know quite as well how to make butter as Miss Kate."

"That child's a phenomenon," said Cousin Tom, as she left the room. "I wonder what in the world she's going to develop into. Her mind's as mature as a woman's now."

"She has a very remarkable nature," said Winfred. "Her power of love is limitless, and her loyalty and devotion are simply wonderful."

Vida was interested in Peggy, but more so in Miss Kate. She awaited her arrival with some trepidation. When she entered, Vida experienced a shock of extreme surprise; it was hard to reconcile the distinguished-looking woman who dawned upon her with the butter-making from which she had come. The juxtaposition seemed a sacrilege. She was tall, and her carriage was queenly in its calm dignity and repose, — a quality her plain gingham dress did not detract from in the least. She was one of those rare women whose advantages of person are entirely independent of their clothes. Her fine dark hair was turning gray; her face, while not regular in outline or features, gave the impression of being handsome. Her expression was perhaps too self-contained ordinarily, but it softened into most sympathetic sweetness when she smiled. She greeted Ethel warmly, as if pleased to see her, and met Cousin Tom with a cordiality which he returned in full. His admiration for Miss Kate was not far from boundless. She took a seat beside Vida, and began talking to her upon usual unimportant topics, yet, without being able to analyze it, Vida felt in her a power balanced and controlled and infinitely womanly.

After they had been conversing a few minutes Ethel turned to Miss Grey. "Harry expects to put your letter in the next 'Week's Echo,'" she said. "He thinks it's the strongest paper on the subject that he's ever read. He wants to know why you don't write a book."

"When one's family is illuminated by a magnificent electric lamp, one does n't light a candle to sputter ridiculously beside it," said Miss Grey.

"Kate, for a sensible woman, you make some astonishingly foolish remarks," said Winfred. "All Kate needs to put her among the first writers of the day, are a few grains of my conceit."

"Now you hear one of Winfred's favorite brotherly illusions," retorted Miss Grey. "But I'm glad Mr. Wendell's found place for my letter. If it has any strength it's the strength of earnestness."

"It wants all you can pack into it, my dear Miss Kate," said Cousin Tom. "We're a miserable, indifferent lot, and it takes more to move us than to start a balky horse uphill."

"You certainly can't include yourself in the list of the indifferent," said Miss Grey. "A man who pours at least half his income into improved tenements, shop-girls' homes, newsboys' clubs—"

"Tut, tut, tut!" said Cousin Tom, hastily, and getting very red, "you're entirely mistaken. I live on the fat of the land with it; I eat ortolans and terrapin with it; I buy books I never read and pictures I never look at; and if I don't happen to think of anything else I want, I occasionally put what's left over into a hospital box, or donate it to an old man's reformatory. Miss Kate, when the world gets tired of starving and grinding what's going to happen?" His hurry to change the subject was almost ludicrous.

"Women are going to make it better," said Ethel. "It'll be our turn, then."

"When the masculine half of humanity loses its temper and its head, *we* are going to step in and save the world from chaos," Miss Grey laughed as she spoke. She was not above some playfulness in treating of a subject that interested her vitally.

"God bless women!" said Cousin Tom, with interjective ardor. "That's my first and last motto, and I'll die sticking to it."

Somebody answered Cousin Tom, and, one remark leading to another, the conversation turned upon the highest phase of the modern "woman question," and then drifted into a discussion of other social and political interests. The ideas expressed were for the most part familiar enough to the thoughtful of the age, but to Vida were forcefully novel. It seemed as though every human being she now met, every situation in which she found herself, conspired to furnish her with new matter for reflection, to add fresh fuel to the fire of her aspirations. If her education in advanced thought had hitherto been neglected, there was no question but that of late it was being vigorously pushed.

Winfred watched her closely while directing the discussion in channels best suited to his purpose, — observation of the effects produced upon this fellow soul whom he had elected to make a subject of special study. When a man's interest in a woman becomes psychological, the possibility of its becoming sentimental is not remote. He felt distinctly annoyed when his pleasing diversion was suddenly interrupted.

"Winfred, Winfred," called a hale and somewhat impatient voice from outside. "Can you come here a minute? I want you."

"Father," said Winfred in explanation to Vida, as he rose and went to the door.

Vida glanced through the window and saw an old gentleman with a fine head and patriarchal luxuriance of silvery hair and beard. He was seated at the gate in a light wagon, and looking impatiently towards the house. Winfred certainly bore a decided resemblance to him, but a resemblance much modified by the more delicate, idealistic qualities so noticeable in his mother.

"Can't you come in a moment, father?" asked Miss Grey, following Winfred. "Ethel's here and —"

"So am I," said Cousin Tom, following Miss Grey.

"How de do, how de do, Mr. Ives?" called the old man, "I wish I could stop, but I'm just down from the meadows for a minute, and I'll have to get right back again."

"Well, if you won't come in to me I'll go out to you," said Ethel.

"We'll all come," said Cousin Tom.

"That's right, come along; I'm going round to the barn and want Winfred to help me with something; you can all help."

"Won't you go?" asked Winfred of Vida, as he lingered behind the others.

Vida looked at his mother sitting quietly and patiently in her chair. It seemed cruel to leave her there alone. "I'll follow you by and by," she said; "I want to stay and talk to Mrs. Grey for a while."

He divined her feeling, and looked gratified. His mother did not mind being alone, she had too many sweet thoughts to find solitude irksome ; but he did not protest, for Vida's consideration pleased him too much.

"If you're too long, I'll come back for you," he said, and Vida nodded to him, and told him not to hurry.

"I'm so glad to have you stay just a little bit," said Mrs. Grey. "I don't know, my dear, what it is, but I feel my heart drawn right out to you."

There was a low stool beside the old lady's chair. Vida hesitated diffidently for a moment, then sat down upon it. Mrs. Grey laid her hand on the girl's head and stroked her hair. No one had ever done so since her mother had died. A wistful sadness came over Vida, partly because of her own memories, partly in sympathy for this sweet, gentle spirit suffering without a murmur the blotting out of all earth's beauties from her sight.

"I'm so sorry," she murmured, speaking her thought involuntarily ; "it must be so hard, so dreadful."

"Not now," answered the old lady, catching her meaning, — "not now. It's become a blessing, just as everything becomes a blessing if you take it the right way. Just see how it is. God's let me be shut away from a great many things of this world ; but it's given me a wonderful chance to know about the things of the spiritual world. I have n't had to wait so long as folks who see, and have n't time to think and to hear the Spirit talking to them. Oh, my dear, it's a sweet, peaceful life ; it's the heaven within that the Scriptures tell about, — the place where nothing sad or evil ever comes."

Vida turned and, leaning her arms on the old lady's knee, gazed up at her wonderingly, reverently. The dear time-marked face had upon it a radiance of quiet joy, a sort of luminous transparency of heavenly light.

"Talk to me, tell me about it," said Vida.

Mrs. Grey paused, then said tenderly, "It's hard for young folks to understand ; but it's this way, — just to love folks and

not think very much about one's self. Some think it's going to meeting, and some think it's long prayers and Scripture reading; but that's all no use unless you love folks, then God comes right into your heart and stays there."

Vida did not understand very much of what it all meant, but she did feel the sweetness and holiness of a beautiful spirit in the old lady's words. "If I could have known you all my life," she said, — "if I could have been near you, I — I should be different from what I am."

There was a pathos in Vida's tones that stirred all Mrs. Grey's sympathy.

"There's been One near you all the time, dear child," she said; "and He's brought you right here to-day because mebbly He's got something for me to do for you now."

Vida leaned her head against the old lady's knee, and then both were silent. When Winfred came back he found them sitting so. He saw them through the open door, and stepped noiselessly onto the piazza and looked in at one of the windows. It was a picture to remember, — the white-haired, sightless old lady with the smile of peace on her face, and the beautiful girl at her feet wrapped in thought. Winfred caught his breath, and a quick thrill tingled along his nerves. It startled him, it was so sudden and unexpected. He turned and walked quietly into the room.

"It's you, Winfred?" said his mother, raising her head. "I've kept her too long, just like a selfish old woman."

Vida turned and met Winfred's eyes. There was a light in them that confused her. Her own eyes fell beneath his gaze, and a bright color mounted to her cheeks. For a few seconds — it seemed minutes — neither of them spoke or moved. The old lady broke the spell.

"Go, now, my dear," she said, "they're waiting for you."

"Give me your hand and I'll help you up," said Winfred.

He clasped the hand with a warm, firm grasp. She felt very self-conscious at his touch. She had never felt so before. He

stooped and kissed his mother, who smiled contentedly and told them to have a good time. As they went out of the house he looked at Vida, and she, as if compelled to it, raised her eyes to meet his. Again the glowing light shone in them, the searching glance seemed to penetrate into her very soul. She tossed her head with a little defiant motion. "Don't look at me so," she said; "I have n't grown either wings or a hump since you saw me last."

She was surprised at her own temerity. Those flashes of emotional homage had cost Winfred much of her childlike awe, put her on a more even level with him, aroused the woman in her to a subtle sense of her own fascination and power.

"Excuse me, I'll try and improve my manners," said Winfred. "Father has beguiled Ethel and your cousin off to the meadows, and I've been ordered to conduct you after them. If you care to, I can take you through the loveliest road you ever saw, so lovely it might lead to the Garden of Eden, if that indefinite paradise were still in existence."

He led the way around by the kitchen and dairy. Peggy was standing on one of the doorsteps with her hat in her hand.

"Is the butter done, Peggy?" he asked, stopping a moment.

"Yes, long ago."

"Why did n't you go with father and the rest then?"

"I did n't want to." The girl hesitated a mere fraction of a second before answering.

"If Miss Kate looks for us, Peggy, tell her we've gone after them."

"I know, I heard you say you'd follow them."

Winfred lightly touched her cheek with his hand, and Vida smiled at her; but as they walked away, and she stood watching them, into her big eyes came a dazed look of surprised pain. Never in all her experience had Mr. Grey left her behind alone on such an occasion. She had not joined the others because she had waited for him. His society was always her choice, when she had the option of making one. Winfred was

fully aware of her expectations, and gauged the measure of her disappointment near enough to feel very uncomfortable. His egotistical act at the expense of a peculiarly sensitive child interfered greatly with his enjoyment. And yet he did not regret the act, though planning innumerable ways of atoning. His interest in Vida had acquired the quality which makes a man instinctively desire to be alone with the object of that interest, and prompts him to overthrow any intervening obstacles. The psychological stage had already merged into the emotional.

They went through the orchard. Many of the trees were very old, all gnarled and twisted by time into picturesque shapes, and laden with a promising display of green baby fruit. Wild poppies and snapdragon grew among the luxuriant grass, making bright bits of color here and there; the sun danced in warm patches through the trees, and the trees waved leafy shadows over the sun-patches. Crossing the field beyond the orchard, they struck into one of those little-used, grass-grown roads through the woods where interlaced branches make a leafy arcade overhead. The shady coolness of the place was grateful after the bare field of glaring heat. A gurgling stream came out of the depths of the woods and kept near them all the way, sometimes winding out of sight, but always reappearing, sometimes cutting right across the line of the road which then spanned it by a bridge. At a crossing where the stream was wider and deeper than usual, and its bed lay some ten feet below the road, a railing had been deemed necessary to the safety of the wayfarer. They stopped and, leaning against the railing, looked into the clear, flowing water. There was fine sand at the bottom, and rocks shelved from the banks into the stream. The sun, glinting between the trees down through the water, turned it into a sort of golden transparency and gave a rich golden-brown hue to sand and rocks, like the amber gleam in Peggy's eyes. Two or three cardinal flowers glowed gorgeously among the ferns on the banks. In spite of the song of the brook and the rustling leaves its perfect solitude gave to the spot a sense of deep stillness.

"That rock down there—the one covered with moss and shaded by the chestnut-tree—is highly to be recommended as a seat. Would you like to try it?" he asked. "The trunk of the tree makes a fine back."

"Have we time?" asked Vida.

"Time is entirely relative. It depends solely on the object in view. According to present count we've plenty."

She was quite willing to accept his computation without question, so he helped her down the bank through the bushes and tall grass, and when she was seated picked one of the cardinal flowers for her. As she fastened it in her dress, he threw himself on the rock beside her. Then it was not much wonder that the meadows, old Mr. Grey, Cousin Tom, and Ethel faded from her thoughts, while, to entertain and so hold her captive with him in this bower of enchantment, he delved into the storehouse of his inexhaustible knowledge and exerted all the magic of his exuberant fancy. When she finally remembered for what they had come out, she discovered with consternation that a whole hour had taken to itself wings forever, and it was too late to join the party in the meadows.

"Why did n't you tell me instead of making me forget?" she asked reproachfully.

"I forgot myself," he answered with perfect truth; "but I really can't say I'm sorry."

And in her heart Vida was not sorry either. When they got back they found Cousin Tom, Mrs. Grey, and Ethel sitting on the piazza, wondering what had become of them. Winfred's explanation was given with plausible ease, but Cousin Tom's round blue eyes fastened themselves a moment upon his face, and like an electric shock into Cousin Tom's mind flashed a thought that made him tingle all over.

The girls had made a long visit, and it was time to go home. Cousin Tom said he must go too. Both Mrs. Grey and Miss Kate gave Vida a cordial invitation to come soon again, and she drove off pondering not a little upon the difference between farmers as she had conceived them, and farmers as she had found

them. That evening she and Cousin Tom went for a stroll after dinner as they often did. She was enthusiastic about her day's experience, and the wily little gentleman felt himself aglow with a satisfaction whose excess he had hard work to conceal. If thought of his unsuspecting cousin-in-law, Gordon Radcliffe, came into his mind, it in no way interfered with his extreme cheerfulness.

"My dear," he said, picking a blade of grass and biting it reflectively, — "my dear, I was a good deal disappointed about young Vaughn and you. He always seemed to me a manly, straightforward young fellow, and I thought he'd make you happy. But after all, I'm — well, I'm just as glad you did n't fancy him."

Frank Vaughn! Whatever possessed Cousin Tom to speak of him? The young man and her whole experience with him had for the last few weeks been as things of the dead past, decently interred and forgotten. Cousin Tom's words brought him to her recollection like a ghost of her own folly. That letter she had written him, — that insane, foolish letter! The next thought brought relief. He must have received it long before this, and — he had never answered it. The discourtesy now dawned upon her as a blessing without any disguise whatever.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOR the week following Vida and Ethel's call at the farm Winfred applied himself assiduously to work. He had been considerably startled to find with what willingness he had given up a whole morning to the society of Miss Vida Radcliffe, at the cost too of neglecting some special manuscript for which the publisher was impatiently clamoring. After Vida had gone, he had taken himself to task for his folly. The feeling which prompted the folly must have been stronger than he realized or desired. Was he going to let himself be carried off his feet by a fair face and a woman's power of fascination? What business had he to be mooning around with a beautiful girl, feeling the quick throbs of passion in his pulses? He remembered his boyhood's infatuations, and smiled at his manhood's sudden susceptibility. It was a susceptibility hitherto quite in abeyance. As with all true men, he was fond of woman's companionship, and appreciated its refinement and charm; but his devotion to work had absorbed him. Work had been his heart's love and soul's idol. No one, man or woman, had ever disputed its ascendancy over him. He was disturbed by the emotional delight of that hour's idyl in the woods. Whatever it meant, work was the antidote; and he held himself rigorously to his desk, till a day came when he suddenly threw down his pen, put on his hat, and, calling Siegfried, strolled aimlessly out of the house down the road to the shore. He kept on till he reached the sea, and then passed the afternoon among the rocks, meeting no one the whole time. He was half inclined to stop at the Wendells', but decided not to, and went home in a restless frame of mind, feeling unreasonably dissatisfied and irritated. He thought of running up to town for a week; an idea which,

however, he did not carry out. The next day he walked over to Red Rock again, and again went down to the shore. Then for a person prudently fleeing danger he did a very foolish thing. Vida was sitting alone reading in the shadow of a big boulder. He saw her, but she did not see him, so there was no necessity at all for running straight into a situation he had been so carefully avoiding. With a reckless inconsistency which he did not attempt to restrain he walked directly up to her. "Of course I can't be half so interesting as the book," he said, "but may I stay a little while?" He stayed over three hours. They watched together the glorious stretch of sun-bathed ocean, blue as the clearest sapphire, and sparkling and shimmering all over its rippling surface; watched the dip and sweep of an approaching gull, the quick, nervous flight of a flock of sand snipe, the sudden view of a porpoise-back, rolling slowly, half out of water, the passing of a fleecy white cloud borne on through space with that swift, even motion which gives additional indefiniteness and mystery to its vapory substance. Winfred also watched the varying expression of Vida's face. It certainly betrayed pleasure in the day and its beauties, and — perhaps a little in his society. His attitude towards her had become much less fatherly. He was more conscious of her as a woman, and less as a mere undeveloped girl with possibilities. He reflected that there were more things in the world than his pen and his fame, — things well worth enjoying. Why should he not enjoy them, enjoy them to the full as far as they went, as far as they carried him? How far might that be? Sufficient unto the day is the *good* thereof.

He made a discovery that afternoon which added a new zest to his taste for Vida's society, and also furnished a valid excuse for seeking it. He had taken up her book and opened it at a place where a loose sheet of paper lay between the leaves. The paper was covered with writing. He supposed it some extract which Vida had made, and asked if he might read it. Not thinking much about it, she carelessly assented.

"That's as dainty and sweet a thing as I've seen for a long

time. Where did you get it?" he asked, and began reading it aloud.

"Oh!" gasped Vida, at the first words.

He turned and looked at her. She was all blushes and confusion.

"Did *you* write it?" he asked, and Vida, overcome with diffidence at discovery and delight at his praise, confessed her guilt.

"I've always scribbled nonsense since I was a little girl," she admitted.

"A person who writes like that," he held up the paper, "has marked literary talent. Will you show me something else you've done, — something longer if you have it?"

A few days later, meeting him again on the rocks, not entirely by chance this time, she took courage to give him a fanciful sketch she had written since coming to Red Rock. He found plenty of crudities in it, but also much originality, and was confirmed in his first impression of her ability. And so he became a sort of literary preceptor to Vida and a godfather to her budding talent. In one way and another she saw a great deal of him. They met at the Wendells', and sometimes on the rocks or back in the woods. But it was not in Winfred's nature to practise pretence of any kind for very long, so he soon gave up the transparent deception of meeting by chance, and asked her one day to appoint a time when he could see her again. It had troubled her at first. It meant nothing more nor less than recognition of the clandestine character of their acquaintance, and the throwing off of all disguising formality in the matter. To make fixed appointments in definite terms seemed an entirely different thing from making them by tacit suggestion. While maintaining some semblance of the hap-hazard she was able to delude herself into belief of its reality. She naturally shrank too from such direct defiance of what would be her father's uncompromising orders. But Winfred's strong convictions and desires brooked very little active opposition. His success in forcing his way through life had greatly intensified a

natural self-will of much vigor and persistence. His acquaintance with Vida had progressed far enough by then for him to exhibit a few of his human failings; and, seeing her hesitate, he spoke with some impatience.

"Have n't you courage enough yet to think and act for yourself, to take upon yourself the responsibility of your own life?" he said. "What I ask is perfectly legitimate in the circumstances."

"I owe some obedience to my father."

Winfred's argument was much handicapped by the impropriety of free comment upon that gentleman's character, even for his daughter's welfare.

"Of course every child has duties to its parents," he answered; "and obedience up to a certain point is one of them. It depends a good deal on the parent where the point lies. It needs wisdom to know where parents' rights end and the child's begin, where deference to their will ceases to be a virtue and becomes a treachery to the law of individual growth. In this case your rights are clear."

In the end her reason was convinced. A correlative inclination on her part helped him to victory, and their meetings were thereafter arranged by appointment. Winfred knew that he had helped Vida already and could help her more. There was no presumption in his estimate of the benefit which he could be to her. The benefit was a self-evident fact. Any companionship that stimulated her mind and drew out her true character was to her unmistakable advantage. He was perfectly satisfied as to the righteousness of his action. Radcliffe's tyrannical prejudice and mental and moral obliquity necessitated it.

And so the weeks passed peacefully away. Nothing very eventful happened. Vida went again several times to Hill Top Farm, once or twice with Cousin Tom. She generally saw Peggy on these occasions, and tried to make friends with her; but the girl was singularly self-contained in her presence. Driving home one day Vida commented upon the fact to Cousin Tom, who confessed having noticed and wondered at it himself. He

remained silently thoughtful for a moment, then, "That child's parents were friends of your parents once," he said, "Your mother loved Helen Dinsmore as a sister. Don't you remember her at all?"

"Dinsmore, Dinsmore? Yes, I *do* remember. Why have we lost sight of her all these years? I must tell papa at once."

"Your father knows all about her."

"He does? Then why have n't I known; why have n't we all known?"

"My dear, your father was a rich man and became richer; Henry Dinsmore remained poor. The families drifted apart, though till Henry died your father kept up a down town acquaintance with him."

"But they were mamma's friends, and we had no business to drift apart."

"My dear little girl, wealth has a way of dropping poor relations and friends by the road-side, and when it does the dropped very soon fade miraculously out of existence. Mrs. Dinsmore's coming to visit the Greys soon," he added, "I'll take you over to call on her." And, true to his word, he did take her. The meeting was a touching one. Mrs. Dinsmore cried a little, and Vida's eyes had tears in them. She promised to see Mrs. Dinsmore frequently in town. But notwithstanding all this Peggy remained inaccessible.

Mabel and Julian got back from their visit, and for a while disturbed the serenity of Vida's existence very much. They could not fit in with her new friends, and could not understand what they called her "crank craze," the opprobrious words expressing their estimate of the Wendells, and also of her sudden mental aberration in regard to them. Vida's problem of escaping the visit to Bess Huntington solved itself. Mrs. Huntington was taken seriously ill with typhoid fever, and of course all her expected guests had to be put off. About the same time an invitation came from an aunt at Bar Harbor, asking the two elder girls and Julian to spend several weeks

with her. Mabel and Julian accepted with almost indecent haste, but Vida declined. Mabel and Julian could make nothing of it. "Unless she's got that Grey man on a string," said Julian. "He won't be a bad appendage next winter, as it's the fashion these days to go slumming in Bohemia for freaks." As the season advanced Winfred had to be frequently in New York, looking after the thousand details of his play's coming production. Radcliffe visited Red Rock at very rare intervals, and for very short periods at a time, consequently, to Vida's extreme relief, he remained in happy ignorance of the wolf in his sheep-fold, as personified by Winfred. Vida heard rumors of a strike among the employees of a silk factory her father had started in Hoboken, and also heard rumors of a big railroad failure. Her father was a director and large stockholder in the company.

Vida saw a great deal of the Wendells, and her intimacy with them developed rapidly. They did the usual things people do in summer. They read together, to Vida's decided advantage; took long walks along the coast and back inland when it was cool enough; drove and bathed and had picnic lunches and suppers. Altogether the days slipped along evenly and pleasantly. Whatever climaxes were approaching in the lives of the actors on the tranquil scene of Red Rock, there was no outer evidence of coming disturbance. The calm before the storm was complete. The only cloud on the horizon was an unmistakable change in Ethel. At first every one tried to ignore or explain it away, but after a while it passed the ignoring point. She grew decidedly thin and pale; beneath the tan of wind and sun the color faded entirely from her cheeks. Sometimes she was apparently as cheerful and full of spirits as ever, and at others seemed borne down by a depression which she could not shake off.

Things remained in about this condition till past the middle of August, then at last the hour of change struck, and the weeks of quiet, unseen preparation began to bear their fruit of hurrying events. The crises of life always take us unawares; they

always seem causeless outbursts of despotic fortune. After a while, when we get far enough away from them to have sufficient perspective, we trace out their logical sequence of inception, growth, and occurrence.

Gerard, much to his own and every one's else regret, was obliged to keep a promise to go to the White Mountains with some artist friends. The day before he was to leave, Margaret, Bertha, and Vida took him to a grove in the woods where they all were fond of passing an afternoon. Ethel was finishing a sketch, and said she would follow later. After a while Vida and Bertha wandered farther into the woods, and Margaret and Gerard were left alone. The prospect of his near departure weighed upon him, and a look of sadness in Margaret's eyes and peculiar uneasiness in Margaret's manner filled him with sudden anxiety. When she would not tell what troubled her, but put him off with vague denials, his apprehension and longing to comfort her carried him on to the full confession of his love. He sat silent, almost remorseful, after he had spoken; while she remained with clasped hands and bowed head, and answered nothing. But at last she slowly looked up.

"Gerard, I love you next to my God," she said.

When he took her in his arms and pressed his lips to hers he reached a moment of happiness so pure, so supreme, that the fulness of earthly joy seemed realized once and for all. Margaret's love shone in her face, calm, deep, holy — and passionless. He did not want passion, for the time felt none himself; if he had he would have loathed himself for it. His exaltation held all ordinary instincts and feelings in abeyance. Her love humbled him, as modesty is always humbled by the bestowal of of some great blessing.

"You won't go away now?" she asked. In man's present imperfect condition even the saintliest become selfish in the first glow of sudden bliss.

"No, I won't go; they'll let me off now."

They were seated on the trunk of a tree which some storm

had blown down. Gerard took her hand and held it as a devout worshipper holds some sacred relic of his faith. Margaret's nature was of the kind that happiness stills and makes speechless. She never could give demonstrative expression to her feelings. Gerard told her of his worshipping veneration, of his months of longing and fear, how presumptuous the thought of telling his love had seemed; and she, in genuine distress, her clear blue eyes looking into his, deprecated the ideal which he had built of her. Half an hour passed, when there was a sound among the underbrush, and Ethel called to them as she came through the trees. They did not start or even release each other's hand. They felt no shyness in Ethel's presence. Gerard's face was illumined with a beautiful radiance; Margaret's was calm, serious, its expression like that of a deep, still pool with the light of sunrise upon it. There was a slight faltering in Ethel's step, and steeling of her features; but she was too far off for it to be noticed. They rose as she drew near.

"I've told her," said Gerard, with the ring in his voice that great joy gives, — "I've told her at last, and —"

"And — and evidently it's all right," Ethel interrupted, brokenly.

"Won't you kiss me, Ethel?" said Margaret, in her quiet way.

Ethel put her arms around her then and kissed her. "Where are the other girls?" she asked.

"They went off that way," answered Gerard.

"Do they know?"

"No, it's only just happened. Will you kiss me too, Ethel? You're my real sister now, you know."

He stooped and touched her lips with his as he spoke. She drew back fearfully, then, with a quick impulse, too quick for thought to restrain, she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him as Margaret never, never would, never could. It startled him, though he was as guilelessly unsuspecting of its meaning of passion and pain as a child. The next second

Ethel sprang back, her face burning, while she laughed with confused nervousness.

"There, brother Gerard," she said, turning from him. "Now I'm going to spread the news. You said they went that way, didn't you?" She dashed off into the woods and left them dazed by the suddenness and vehemence of her actions.

It had come at last, and she had to face it as an actual fact, not an indefinite probability of the future. As often happens when some anticipated blow finally strikes us, it seemed to numb sensation. She thought she had suffered all she could; she now knew a time of suffering confronted her worse than anything yet endured, though after the first shock she did not then feel it. This paralysis of feeling seemed to quicken the action of her mind. All the details of her coming ordeal arose vividly before her, but the realization was merely intellectual, unaccompanied by any emotional shrinking.

As soon as beyond reach of Margaret and Gerard's sight, she turned out of the foot-path she was following right into the thick growth of trees, meaning to escape the girls, and pretend she had missed them. She forced her way through the tangled underbrush, and at last came to the edge of the woods from where the meadows stretched down to the sea. Climbing the loose stone fence between the woods and fields, she went straight on, her mind all the while busily picturing the future, her heart still numb and unfeeling. She painted her situation crudely, uncompromisingly. It had a very hideous look, — a girl loving her sister's husband! If the conditions were reversed, — if she were in Margaret's place, Margaret in hers, — Margaret would grapple with this unsanctioned love and hold it in the vise of indomitable purpose till it lay crushed, dead under her feet. That she herself should ever cease loving Gerard was no more possible than for the sun to cease shining. She could not, — yes, and if she could she would not do it. Through all the agony, through all the sin, if it were to be sin, there was a tortured joy in loving him which she would not give up. She smiled

ironically at the idea of humiliation involved in most persons' views of a woman's unrequited love. It seemed such a naïve demonstration of the opinion that a man's affections are at his own disposal, a woman's to be kept decorously comatose till asked for, and then prodded into life and measured out to order.

She reached the shore about a quarter of a mile beyond their own house, at a point where a small bay ran back some distance into the mainland. A bridge crossed the bay where it was narrowest, and here she stopped to look down into the water. It was deep, twenty feet or more, but very clear, and two crabs swimming lazily about attracted her attention, even amused her for a while. After tiring of them, she crossed the bridge and went on to the rocks. The spot she sought was shut away from all sight of human habitation or life. When she reached it, she sat down; and then, little by little, the power of feeling revived, and, leaning her head upon her knees, she broke into dry, tearless sobs.

In the mean time off in the woods Margaret and Gerard waited for her to come back. They waited till the other girls returned without her. It was getting near the supper hour, and, after calling her a few times, they decided to wait no longer, concluding, as she intended they should, that, having missed the girls, she had gone home. But when they got back she was not to be found anywhere in the house. Margaret wanted to see her, see her alone and feel her sympathy in this time of great new happiness. Ethel had undoubtedly gone off by herself to think about it all, and the change it would necessarily bring in their life of constant companionship. The place Ethel had chosen was a favorite with them both, and Margaret went directly there. Ethel did not hear her approach. The sea and the tumult in her own soul made her deaf to the light sound of her sister's footsteps. When Margaret saw her bent form, and heard the moan of her despairing anguish, she stopped astonished and terrified. Then she called in a high, unnatural key: "Ethel, Ethel," and sprang to her side, and

laid her hand upon her. Ethel started up, and the awful look Margaret saw on her face almost made the elder girl's heart stop beating.

"Ethel, what is the matter? For pity's sake tell me! Ethel, why don't you speak?"

"I'm ill."

"How, where? You must get back to the house at once."

"Don't trouble me, I can't."

"You must; I'll help you."

"I can't."

"Then I'll have to fetch some one else. I'll get Gerard." Already she had turned to go.

"Stop," said Ethel, with such fierce pain in her voice that Margaret looked at her in dismay. Then the fixed, dumb stare of Ethel's eyes into her own in one instant told the truth. Margaret gave one look of petrified horror. She covered her face with her hands, and a chill went through her from head to foot. The next moment the sisters were looking at each other, incapable of speech or motion, till Ethel at last moved heavily as if to go. Margaret seized her by the arm.

"How long—how long have you cared?" she asked huskily.

"I don't know. I can't tell. Always, I think."

"Why have n't you said so? Why have n't you told me?"

"What for?"

"Oh, I don't know! What shall I do? O God, what must I do?"

"Why did you come here? You've brought this on yourself; but there's nothing for *you* to be miserable about. *You* have him. As for me, there are plenty like me in the world. Somebody always has to be wretched that somebody else can be happy. I'll bear it, just as other people bear it."

"Don't speak to me so, Ethel, don't."

"I don't know how I'm speaking to you. Perhaps I'm crazy. Margaret, Margaret, forgive me!" She broke down at last, and, throwing herself into Margaret's arms, cried uncon-

trollably, while Margaret, holding her, felt a grim, awful thought of possible sacrifice throbbing in her own brain and tightening about her heart. It seemed an eternity that Ethel lay sobbing in her arms.

"I did n't mean it," cried the girl; "I'm ill, I've been ill for a long time, and I say things I don't mean. Why he — he's just like one of the boys to me, Harry and Clyde; that's all." Then the wild sobs would come again. But at last the violence of her suffering exhausted itself, and she sank back with her head on Margaret's shoulder. There were tense lines about her brow and mouth, and a pitiful, blank look in her eyes.

"I'll go home now," she said.

Margaret took her hand, and they went side by side. Once Ethel stopped suddenly. "I've done a wicked thing," she said. "I've ruined your happiness. Margaret, tell me I have n't!"

Margaret tried to say so; but her lips were dry and parched, and the misery in her own heart choked back the words she would have spoken.

"You can't say it. Margaret," she gazed at her fearfully, "you'll do nothing, you'll change nothing? Answer me, quick, answer!"

"I can't think now. By God's help I will do what is best, what is right."

"I will not move from here till you promise one thing. You will not tell — tell *him anything*?"

"No," said Margaret, "nothing about you."

"We'll go in the back way," said Ethel. "Say I'm not well and sha'n't come down to-night."

Margaret hurried to her own room. She felt faint and exhausted. The hopelessness of the situation appalled her. If she sacrificed herself, and laid her life joy on the altar, what good would it do! It would only wreck Gerard's life as well as her own. She could not make him love Ethel. "Why must such misery poison the greatest blessing of my life?" she cried.

“It’s cruel, cruel !” And her soul was filled with bitterness. Like other people in the first throes of calamity she felt vaguely that some special Providence should have intervened between her and disaster, turned it aside, forbidden it. When a calmer time came, she realized the folly of the thought. Cross purposes are not in the divine order of things. Somebody had made a mistake. Was it Ethel, or Gerard, or herself? Desires, passions, egoism, create semblances so like reality that they deceive the very elect.

CHAPTER XIV.

THAT evening Winfred, with Siegfried at his heels, walked over to Red Rock. He walked far up the shore, and at about nine o'clock was strolling back by the road towards the Wendell and Radcliffe cottages.

In the case of a man of Winfred's temperament, however satisfying his vocation, however great its exaltations and ambitions, it cannot quite fill out that dream-life lived by all imaginative natures apart from the rush and turmoil of the real. Such a man's devotion to work may exclude the close association of any particular woman with his actual existence, but woman in the abstract becomes to him a sort of mystical divinity. Out of this generalized divinity he forms a concrete personality whom he feels a vague longing to meet and surrender to some day. In that dream-life Winfred conceived of a possible tie through which his being would find completion, and he would realize the fulness of joy sought all unconsciously in the passionate pursuit of work. Anything less perfect than the union he pictured he thought of with aversion, for anything less perfect was not marriage, as he looked at it.

No one can hold a high ideal, however seemingly unattainable, and not be the better for it. Winfred's ideal had helped him control his passions and keep his life clean. He refused to accept the world's code of *morality*,—a code which foredooms thousands of women to degradation for the indulgence of man's bestiality. Declining to put himself on such a low plane, he combated fiercely the crying wrong and horror of woman's sacrifice. He fought successfully against the odds of a passionate nature and the facilities for dissipation that beset a man

leading a Bohemian existence free from any restraint of home and family. It is to be noted that the usual derision his sex heap upon a man of decent life was never awarded him except occasionally while he was still a youth. His mental superiority, force of character, and splendid physical development compelled recognition of the fact that it is possible for a man to be conspicuously virile and conspicuously clean at the same time. And all the while the woman of his imagination hovered about him like a guardian angel. Sometimes, in spite of the allurements of his work, he sighed at the thought that so rare a spirit would probably never take material shape, and in the race of life he must run his heat alone. That is, it had been so in the past, but lately — Walking through the clear starlit night thought of his intangible dream-creation mingled inextricably with thought of a very tangible Vida. Vida, day by day, was revealing glimpses of the beauty and strength of nature he had divined, and manifesting a sensitive delicacy that charmed him. There was about her a peculiar grace that satisfied his æsthetic sense completely. And her literary gift showed itself to be even greater than at first he had realized. Community of pursuits is a rare bond in a companionship between man and woman. Vida seemed to embody the very soul of his cherished fancy. But was all this sufficient reason for the fact that a visionary Vida always now sat down beside him when he wrote, went out with him when he walked, presided over his dreams when he slept, and turned his steps every day of his life in the one unflinching direction of Red Rock? He took off his hat and stood with eyes fixed on the ground, heedless of Siegfried's cold nose poked against his hand. Then raising his head and looking up to the stars, "I love her," he said, "I love her, and if she does n't love me —" He felt something tighten about his heart, and grew cold as a man may confronted with some awful calamity. For weeks he had been playing with his feelings. His love had been like a child shutting its eyes and believing itself invisible. It had been perpetually getting into a corner, as it were, and pretending it did not exist.

There were so many reasons against its existing, — her father, her whole family, her own instinct of caste. How would these elements amalgamate with his aggressive radicalism? He unconsciously threw his head back. His own ancestors had been people of good origin, and among them were individuals of distinction. He felt savage with himself for caring that he could hold his own with the world, even according to the trivial Radcliffe standard of equality. By the standard of brains he towered above the whole community of Radcliffe traders and money-getters. He could offer a woman a name that would be familiar the world over when Gordon Radcliffe's would be obliterated even from his tombstone. He had the personal modesty of genius, but also the impersonal consciousness of power.

He thought of Vida's habit of luxury and his own material prospects. His play was coining money. It had run nearly up to July in New York, and then been taken to Chicago, where it had drawn packed houses all summer. His royalties were very large. Increasing prominence in the literary world had enabled him to make better terms than is usual with a first play. And his books were bringing in generous profits. In October the new play would be produced. Then would come fresh success, fresh fame and fortune. He *knew* his work was well done, as genius usually does. If Winfred had no conceit, his pride was colossal, and now asserted itself despotically. Crowned with the glory of greater triumphs, he would ask Vida to be his wife. Then, and not till then, he would speak — in the first flush of new victory. He thirsted for the by no means lofty, but eminently human, gratification of wedding her while his loudest pæans of success rang aggressively in her father's ears. As to Radcliffe's consent, that would certainly never be given, but it could be dispensed with.

He had reached the bridge that crossed the bay. At the same moment two figures appeared at the other end of the bridge, but it was too dark to identify them till they came within a few feet of him. They were Vida and Cousin Tom.

Vida started a little. They all stopped and leaned against the railing of the bridge. It was one of those clear, still nights when the stars seem to shine with unusual brightness. The young crescent moon was just setting behind the pine woods. Vida looked at the moon, and Winfred looked at Vida. Cousin Tom fell to work upon a problem he was eternally solving when these two came together in his presence, — the discovery of a natural process of self-effacement.

"My dear," he said finally, "it's almost nine o'clock, and we'll have to turn back. Your father's coming by the nine-thirty train, you know, and somebody ought to be home to meet him. Your aunt's in bed with a headache, and Clara's at the Clarkes'."

"Yes," said Vida, "we'd better go."

"Won't you walk along with us, Winfred?" asked Cousin Tom, "or I'll tell you," the innocence of his round, bland face was beyond suspicion, "Vida need n't come yet, you can bring her back when she gets ready."

Some of Cousin Tom's manœuvres made Vida very uncomfortable. She objected decidedly to being forced upon a man, and moreover had begun to mistrust her cousin's designs.

"No, I must go with you, Cousin Tom," she said, "and I've walked as far as I want to any way."

"Then sacrifice yourself for me," said Winfred, trying not to appear as eager as he felt. "Besides it's criminal for any one who can help it to lose a minute of such a night."

"Well, you see I can't help it."

Cousin Tom had wisely started on.

"Won't you stay?" begged Winfred. Vida had never heard quite that tone in his voice before. It gave her a tingling sensation.

"Perhaps — I suppose —"

"It's all right," called Winfred to Cousin Tom, "Miss Radcliffe will stay."

"You take a great deal for granted," said Vida.

"All I can get on such occasions."

They crossed the bridge, and continued in the direction from which Winfred had come. Perhaps it is superfluous to say that Vida had long ceased to be hampered by unnecessary conventionalities.

"Is the date fixed yet for the opening night of the play?" she asked.

"Yes, the twenty-seventh of October. We begin rehearsals on the first."

"I *hope* we'll be home. If I missed the first night! I won't miss it if I have to disembody myself and go as a spirit. I know — if we're not home, I'll get Cousin Tom to take me to town for the night."

Winfred's eyes flashed, and his blood throbbed fast in his pulses. "I'll give you a box," he said.

"Will you? It makes me excited just to think of it all. Where are you while it's going on?"

"Behind the scenes in the waits, back of the orchestra, in the balcony, in the gallery, all over during the performance."

"I don't see how you survive it. I'm not sure that I shall. When they bring you out —"

"I'll look first right into your box," he interrupted, "and if I read in your eyes that I've succeeded the whole world can either hoot or hurrah, I sha'n't hear anything but your voice or see anything but your face. If I've failed — I — shall — not — fail; I've written for you." He bent and looked at her as he spoke, then pulled himself up. "I sha'n't be here after the first of September; I've got to be in town, there's so much to attend to. I want to propose something about the two stories you've written. I want to have them published."

"*What!*"

"One will do for the 'Century,' and the other for 'Scribner's' or the 'Cosmopolitan.'"

"Why, Mr. Grey, what are you talking about?"

"I don't see why you can't call me Winfred. How long do the ethics of propriety require this useless formality to be kept up?"

"Winfred, what are you talking about?" She had just courage enough to get it out, but not sufficient to keep from blushing very pink (fortunately he could n't see it in the dark) and feeling very much embarrassed as soon as she had spoken.

"That's perfectly delightful! Say it again, please. You won't? Never mind, you will by-and-by. What am I talking about? Vida — I've been aching to say Vida for a month — I'm talking about a little girl who considers herself a very dignified young lady and who's an exceedingly talented one at the same time. I'm going to reveal her to some mole-eyed editors and publishers who might never discover her alone, and then she's going to make an immortal name for herself."

"Get my stories published!"

"Will you make the changes we decided on, and then send the manuscripts to me?"

"Mr. Grey, are you in earnest?"

"Every time you say Mr. Grey again I'll shout Vida at the top of my lungs. This is your first and only warning."

"Are you in earnest?"

"Dead earnest."

"You know what I mean; about the other thing."

"Vida," — it seemed as though he reiterated her name with needless frequency, — "don't you know that you're a very remarkable girl? Don't you know if you were not, you'd have been moulded irrevocably into the shape of the million women of your class? You've assimilated all the good of your surroundings, the grace and refinement, — you're to the manner born, — but you've kept your individuality intact!"

"I've kept it intact! If I really have any it's because you and the Wendells rescued me from the most hopeless kind of asphyxia. What a summer it's been! I can hardly realize it. And now Mr. Harley's going, and soon you're going, and it's nearly all over."

"When it is all over, and there are no more woods, and no more ocean, and no more rational freedom, how am I to see you?"

I suppose you understand that I will see you, if I have to provide a rough or a burning theatre every other day to do it. It'll be necessary from a purely business point of view now that you're to be launched on a literary career. Have you planned any definite work for the winter?"

"Yes, lots of it. Of course I'll go on writing, as you've encouraged me so much; but I intend to do something for other people too. My head's full of ideas. Margaret is going to help me sort them out. I feel all excited and enthusiastic about it; but I suppose there'll be no end of difficulty and discouragement."

They stopped and sat down on a stone by the way-side. "Plenty," he said. "I remember my own excitement and enthusiasm when I was twenty-three. I was going to sweep the world as spick and span as a well-ordered house after a spring-cleaning; single-handed I was going to make the entire human race happy and respectable. I was going to be a leader and a hero, a martyr too if necessary. What a flash in the pan! Maturity has been nothing but the falsification of a generous, though somewhat bombastic, youth."

"That is n't true," said Vida; "and it looks like simple affectation to say so."

"Little girl, little girl, I believe you will be strong and true in the real life you've begun; you'll be a living factor in that growing force which is slowly, surely bringing about a higher order of things in a world where self and might have ruled so long. I've tried to be true too, after a fashion, and I have n't altogether failed, but I have n't been a hero or a martyr yet."

"You would be if the time ever came for it."

He thought so too, if she looked at him like that. He thrilled with the ardor a man always feels when a woman shows her belief in his courage and loyalty.

"Tell me just what you mean by a higher order of things," she said.

"I mean that the social machinery has got to be adjusted to a

new standard ; every man has got to consider the welfare of his brother as well as his own pleasure and profit."

"You've seen about the strike of the men in my father's silk factory? Who's in the wrong, my father or the men?"

"As the papers state it, your father wants to cut down the men's wages twenty per cent, because he's making ten per cent less profit than last year. His theory is that the men should share the consequences of the depression; the men's theory, that he should stand the consequences alone, because he can do it without material suffering, while any reduction in their earnings means lack of clothes and food for themselves and their families. It's not a business view of the case; it's purely ethical. But, in addition, they contend that his proportion of gain is in great excess of what he's justly entitled to. It's the reiterated question of capital and labor."

"But don't brains enter into it? Which one of those men could carry on such a business himself?"

"Perhaps a number, if they had the chance and the training. It's a moral question too whether brain-labor is entitled to any higher pay than manual labor; because the quantity of brains a man possesses lies entirely outside his control. Then take into account the enjoyment a clever or intellectual man gets out of his work. At any rate no human being's mind is ten, twenty, fifty millions worth better than other men's. Brains alone can't accumulate excessive wealth; it requires, in addition, an utter disregard for all principles of humanity and —" He stopped abruptly; her own father presented too glaring an example of the fact for him to be so explicit.

Vida herself felt it seemly to drop the subject just then; but it took a place among the hundred other things upon which she had begun to reflect very seriously.

"How you love your work, don't you?" she said, after a few moments. Evidently her thoughts had come around from Winfred's philosophy to Winfred's self.

"Love it! It's been my alpha and omega, my here and

hereafter. But I've made a discovery lately,—a person's work can make him a rampant egoist. Every human creature needs another human creature to love and consider and sacrifice himself for." He paused, and when he spoke again it was in a lowered voice. "What most people call love falls leagues below what will satisfy me. I want a love that will make that other soul another self, make me another self to her, make us absolutely one in aims and hopes. She must feel my thoughts, understand my silence, be the light and life of all my labors. She must be the divine flame igniting my aspirations, the spirit-guide turning my every step towards right and truth. And she must be human too, humanly tender and charitable, and a little humanly wayward and wicked, if she chooses. I would n't put her in a niche just to worship her on Sundays and saints' days. I'd take her by the hand, and we'd face the world together to strive and to achieve. Her sweet truth and purity should steady me, and my strength should shield her. Her intuition should order and direct; my brute force should serve her will. I should be hers in every act and thought of my life. We should be companions, fellow-laborers, and lovers from now throughout all eternity. Is it any wonder I've waited so long to find her?"

"I don't believe she's on earth; she must have gone to heaven."

"No, you're mistaken; she's still flitting about like a winged flower,—looking for me, I hope, when I dare hope,—though she may not know it."

With a strange tremor in her nerves, and flushed warmth on her cheeks, Vida felt how far short she fell of this ideal creation, and yet wondered why, saying so much, he said no more. He was bending over pulling up blades of grass, one by one, and throwing them away. His heart was pounding like a sledge-hammer, and his temples were beating fast. He set his teeth to hold back the words Vida was quivering to hear. Not yet. He would keep to his resolution. Not yet.

Siegfried came and put his head in her lap. She smoothed

his silky white coat, and laid her cheek against his soft nose, attentions which were duly appreciated.

"I must go back now," she said; "it must be after ten."

As she rose, Winfred took her hand and kissed it. She knew that he loved her. What kept him silent? He must know how she loved him, yes, loved him "in the romantic heroine's crazy way," which only a few months ago had been so deprecated. She was no longer in any doubt as to the possession of a heart. From that night it experienced many hours of anxious fear and longing while Winfred was indulging his pride to the full.

"I — shall — not — fail; I've written for you." The words were her assurance of all that his look and manner had declared.

CHAPTER XV.

THEY walked along without saying very much. After a while Vida felt she must talk about something, anything.

"It seems a hundred years since that day in the Park. I've *lived* more since then than in all the rest of my life put together."

"If there's a human being on earth I bless, it's that rowdy."

"You'd have known me any way; we'd have met here," she said, naïvely subscribing to the unexpressed part of his thought.

"Yes; but the rowdy gave me such a fine opportunity, such a good opening. It made my first appearance striking and picturesque." He ignored the fact of his then indifference to the opportunity.

"And the fire was better still."

"I'm wondering whether I've made the most of both chances and of all I've had since."

She laughed a little nervously. "Where's Sieg?" she asked irrelevantly, to hide her too active emotions.

"I don't know; he'll come along in a minute."

Had not Siegfried, dog-fashion, stayed behind to make an utterly useless inspection of a field across which a belated rabbit had taken itself home, he would have been running on ahead, and might have changed the whole course of subsequent events.

"Is n't that somebody standing on the bridge?" asked Vida, as they approached the bay.

"Yes, it's a woman I think."

A few steps more and they were near enough to know that it was a woman. They stopped by mutual impulse, the woman was acting so strangely. Vida, seized with a sudden and apparently causeless fear, drew closer to Winfred. The woman was outside the railing, holding on with one hand and gazing into the water. She raised her head, but it was too dark to distinguish her features. Whether it was something in the attitude of the figure, or the prompting of her own intuition, Vida never realized, but in one second she knew that it was Ethel. She sprang forward with a bound, threw her arms around her, and held her like a vise. Then, with an instinctive desire to save the girl from knowledge of Winfred's presence, she motioned him to keep back. He stood aside watching, ready to give any needful help. For a few moments Ethel struggled frantically. She did not recognize Vida, but only knew some one was holding her so that she could not move. The strength of desperation was in Vida's clasp.

"Let me go, let me go!" cried the girl, and Vida began to feel her strength failing.

"Ethel dear, it's I, Vida."

"Vida!" She did not seem to understand, but the effort to do so quieted her.

"Come with me, dear; get back over the railing."

In a dazed way she did as she was bid, and stood staring at Vida. There was a vacant expression in her eyes. Vida shuddered. Had Ethel gone crazy?

"Come home," she said, — "come home." Then into Ethel's face the intelligence gradually returned. She still stared silently at Vida, and looked terrified. She grasped her convulsively.

"Vida, I came out to — to — Did you prevent me?"

"Yes."

She sank down on the dusty road, and covered her face with her hands. Vida knelt and put her arms about her.

"Tell me, dear," she said, the tears streaming down her own cheeks. Winfred stepped back so that he could not hear.

"I came to kill myself—to *kill* myself. I know that much, I don't know anything else. When I went home, when I was alone, I don't know what I did, I don't know how long it was; I was only thinking I'd ruined his life and hers, just that, and if I were out of the way it would be better for them."

"And it seemed to drive you crazy, and you came out here—"

"Yes, I slipped away when no one heard me. I'd been here in the afternoon, and I remembered how deep the water is. Oh, Vida, it would have been best if you had let me do it! I'm not crazy now; but it would have been best."

"Ethel! Think of your mother, your father; think of Margaret and—Gerard; think if they found you—*there*!"

"Don't, don't!"

"Can't you talk to me; can't you tell me it all? It may help you. I've known part of it for a long time."

"Nothing can help me. I could n't prevent myself from loving him." She spoke in a low, uneven voice. "At first I did n't understand—then when he began to care for Margaret I knew. I tried not to, but—*don't* you understand?—It is n't possible; and all day and all night it's nothing but one endless, endless pain. And not to let any one guess! This summer, while he's been here, right here in the house, not to show any one! Is it any wonder it's made me crazy?"

"Poor Ethel, my poor, poor Ethel!"

"That is n't all. Let me tell it all now, all, all, all!" She pushed her hair back from her face; it was disordered and hanging partly loose.

"I'm listening, I'm listening to every word."

"This summer, after a while it began to come to me that—that—oh, it was horrible—that he'd love me if Margaret were n't there, and that it was n't love he felt for her but a sort of worship that he thought was love. And then some devil kept whispering to me that if I chose he'd love me even then, and that Margaret's love would never, never satisfy him; it was

too calm and still, and by-and-by, when it was too late, he'd want something more—not better, but different, a love he could feel and see—like mine. Don't you understand? I thought it because I *wanted* to think it. It's nearly killed me, it's nearly killed me!"

Vida drew the trembling girl to her, and the struggling heart grew still as though some one had lifted its burden for just a minute to let her rest. She was quiet for a while, then raised herself and looked pleadingly at Vida. "I want to go away," she said; "I can't stay here any more; will you go with me, home, to Boston?"

Vida thought of Winfred. Was she to lose those last happy days before the summer was over, and the troubles began which she foresaw in the old surroundings?

"I'll go if papa will let me," she said.

"To-morrow? Will you go to-morrow?"

"Whenever you wish. Now, dear, come." She kissed her cold cheek and got up. Ethel rose and went quietly with her, and Winfred followed at a little distance.

The girls got into the house unobserved, and Vida also avoided meeting any one on the way out. Winfred was waiting for her near the road, and she went up to him like a tired, frightened child.

"Oh, Winfred," she said, "I'm so glad you're here."

It made him thrill like a school-girl to hear her speak his name so unconsciously.

"My brave little girl, you've been a heroine again." He took her hand and kept it as they went on down the road together. He had to control himself like a stoic to keep from putting his arms about her and telling her everything. His insane pride and iron will were his tyrants and held him dumb.

"What does it all mean?" he asked. "It's been perfectly plain that Ethel is n't well; but this is something very bad. Do you understand it?"

"Yes, but you must n't ask me."

"Is there any fear that she'll do it again?"

Vida shuddered at the suggestion. "No, no, she was crazy. We'll never speak of it, Winfred, never to any living soul."

"I don't know. Her father and mother ought to be told. If anything happened —"

"If it's necessary I'll tell them; but it won't be. I'm going away with her to-morrow."

"*Going away! Where?*"

"To Boston. I — I suppose I sha'n't be back before you leave."

He was silent a long time, then said, with some effort: "Promise you'll see me in town; promise you'll let nothing keep you from seeing me."

"I promise I will see you."

"You'll call on Mrs. Dinsmore; I can see you there."

As they walked on in silence Vida thought: "Why don't you tell me, Winfred, why don't you tell me? If I were the man and you the woman I should not let you leave me so to-night." She drew her hand away from him; unwillingly he loosened his clasp and let her do it. They were too absorbed to remember her father, and, reaching the house, Winfred went in at the gate, up the path to the door. The lamp-light from the hall fell upon his face, and he stood distinctly revealed to Radcliffe, sitting on the veranda, a few steps above. Radcliffe's amazement petrified him for a moment, then he sprang up like a maniac. Rage made him incapable of speech, but he uttered a quick, harsh exclamation.

Winfred took off his hat. "Miss Radcliffe, I'm very much obliged to you for allowing me to accompany you home."

"What are you doing here, you infernal scoundrel?" cried Radcliffe, hoarsely.

"I can't very well answer your father in your presence, Miss Radcliffe, because it would entail a scene, so I'll bid you good-evening." He walked very coolly down the path, perfectly regardless of the abuse Radcliffe hurled after him. Vida, white, horrified, and outraged, stood helplessly by. But it gave her time to think, and when her father turned upon her

she was somewhat prepared to meet him. She must not implicate Cousin Tom, must not excite her father still more against Winfred, and above all must not betray the Wendells' friendship for him if she hoped to go with Ethel. She must be calm and discreet, while her whole nature, revolted at the indignity done the man she loved so passionately, rebelled at her own utter helplessness. She was absolutely in the power of this man, — her father, — insane with rage, incapable of reason, regardless of anybody's rights but those which he considered his own. Any self-assertion on her part would simply put her in a position where she could not see Winfred at all, and could do nothing for Ethel.

"How long have you known that loafer?"

The color crimsoned her face, and her eyes blazed hotly. It was fortunate she stood with her back to the light.

"If you mean Mr. Grey, I've known him a few weeks."

"Where did you meet him?"

"I really can't tell you; at somebody's house here; he knows most of the people." How could she help the prevarication?

"How often have you seen him?"

"I can't possibly say. He does n't live at Red Rock; he only comes over once in a while to make a call." It was becoming something more pronounced than prevarication.

"Has he ever called on *you*?" He looked as if he would strike her to the ground if she said yes.

"Never." She could answer that categorically.

"Are n't you old enough, don't you know enough, have n't you self-respect enough not to form the acquaintance of every rag-tag and bobtail you come across? What were you doing coming home alone with a damned rascal you know nothing about?" He did not usually swear in the presence of his daughters, but the occasion made him oblivious of propriety. "Since when have you considered it respectable to be running round the country at night with men? Where have you been; why did n't you make a servant go for you? Answer me, do you hear?"

"I—I was with a girl from one of the cottages. I expected to come right back ; but she kept me, and then some one had to bring me home, and he happened to be there and offered to."

"Do you know what kind of a man you've allowed to force himself upon you ? A low agitator and corruptor of the ignorant and criminal, an impostor who writes immoral fustian he calls plays, a theatrical hanger-on whose associates are the riffraff of society, — actors, actresses, bar-room loungers, — an infernal scoundrel who's insulted your father, and whom I'm going to crush like a viper under my feet."

Vida grew tense in every nerve and muscle ; only the recollection of Ethel kept her silent. She knew if she once spoke her true thought and feeling any request she might afterwards make would be arbitrarily refused.

Her father suddenly stepped close to her. "Do you know anything about his relation to me ?" He was glaring at her, his face within a foot of hers.

"No."

There was no time to think, and she lied, deliberately lied. She was a woman in whom truth was instinctive. Even as a child she had never saved herself by fibbing. And now during this whole interview she had temporized, falsified, and finally lied uncompromisingly. It made her feel sick and degraded.

"If you *bad* known !" He stepped back with his mouth pressed into the straight line, — a hard, cruel mouth.

"Whenever you meet him, I don't care where, you're not to speak to him, you're not to look at him, not to recognize him under any circumstances whatsoever."

"I've an invitation from Ethel Wendell, one of Aunt Clara's friends, to go with her to Boston for a few weeks. If you'll let me go I sha'n't meet him at all."

"Very well, go. Now sit down a moment ; I've something to say to you. Theodore Vaughn's son Frank called on me to-day. He told me a long story I did n't understand about some letter you'd written after refusing him. He's been in Europe, and did n't get it or something, and he came to ask

my consent to his marrying you. He wanted to explain about the letter, and get your permission to come and see you."

She had turned pale, but spoke quietly. "What did you say, papa?"

"I told him to come, and he'll be here to-morrow."

"But I'm going away."

"Well, then, telegraph him if you choose. But it's time you thought of this matter seriously. I don't know what nonsense you've been up to rejecting this young man, and bringing him back again; but you're old enough not to act like a school-girl any longer, and to look at marriage in the proper light. You'll be twenty-four your next birthday. Vaughn is an excellent match, and I've given my consent to his suit. I suppose you intend to accept him now, or you would n't have written. I want to tell you that I'm very much pleased indeed."

She did not answer. It would have been madness to begin any discussion with her father, and she was bewildered too, and frightened by this sudden untoward event.

"If you acquire a little more self-control" (so unwittingly do men speak) "you will be eminently fitted to preside over a household of your own; you have all the other requisites already. I am proud that my daughter is *grande dame* by nature."

It was rather surprising that she should be, considering his own behavior of that evening. That we have two parents to inherit from instead of but one is a fortunate provision of an all-wise Providence.

CHAPTER XVI.

VIDA and Ethel left Red Rock in the afternoon. Ethel gave some reason connected with her work as the excuse for going. Mrs. Wendell made no objections. She rarely objected to anything any member of her family saw fit to do, believing in the liberty of grown-up children who are in no sense either foolish or vicious. Unquestionably Ethel's departure was a relief to Margaret, who announced her engagement as soon as her sister had left. No one was surprised, and everybody was much pleased.

Arrived in Boston, the two girls went directly to the Wendells' house, a substantial, old-fashioned residence in an old-fashioned Back Bay street.

When Vida consented to accompany Ethel she had not the least idea to what she was committing herself. There would be no servants, the income of the best paid professor being insufficient for the co-maintenance of two establishments. They would have to be their own chambermaids and also their own cooks, unless they went out for their meals. Moreover, for a while they would be alone in the big empty place. Later they could get Harry and Clyde to sleep in the house, but just then both men were out of town. Vida was certainly appalled. The big empty place did not seem so bad, for she was courageous and not given to foolish alarms, but to a young woman who had hardly ever buttoned her own boots, and never so much as dusted a room in her life, the prospect of general housework was overwhelming. As to the cooking — she knew no more about it than a babe. "I don't know much about it myself," admitted Ethel, "but we'll get a cook-book and soon learn." It looked to Vida as though starvation stared them in the face.

And the alternative of tramping out to restaurants at all hours was a Bohemianism which, in spite of all her late advancement, she could not contemplate serenely. It appeared positively disreputable. If her father knew of the actual circumstances of her situation a prompt withdrawal of his original consent would have cut short Vida's visit on the spot ; but she left him in tranquil ignorance, and felt not the slightest compunction in so doing. Besides never having gained her confidence, he had now destroyed what little respect she had managed to retain for him. And she was also getting too old to be submissive under his arbitrary methods of control.

As she and Ethel went up the steps of the deserted house, all bolted and barred for the summer, it did seem grewsomely lonely. And inside it was no whit more reassuring than outside. The blinds were all down, and the shutters closed. Dim white objects, furniture in linen covers and bric-a-brac in sheets, stood like ghosts about the rooms.

They spent the afternoon settling themselves, took off the ghostly linen coverings, made their beds, Vida receiving her first lesson in the art, swept and dusted and arranged with such satisfactory results that Vida's spirits rose, and it all began to look more like play than work. By seven o'clock the girls realized that it was time to have dinner, and then came Vida's great trial. It was too late to think of cooking anything themselves, so there was nothing to do but face the restaurant.

"Is n't it a very — a very queer thing to do?" Vida ventured feebly. She would much rather have bought some crackers and eaten them at home in their unpalatable dryness.

"Why, no. It's a little quiet place we're going to. I've often been. You know we girls don't believe in being restricted by senseless prejudices. Good gracious, one can't be so dreadfully hampered in these days of rationality!"

Before long Vida got used to the restaurant, and even enjoyed it when they felt too tired or too lazy to struggle with the cook-book. She enjoyed the whole queer situation and got a taste of such freedom as she had never before dreamed of. It per-

manently crystallized certain lately revealed phases of her character. The thought crossed her mind occasionally: "What would people say?" The proceeding was unique and, from some standpoints, most reprehensible. However "what people say" was not so important to her as it had been.

At first Ethel seemed to take an interest in their little household and its duties, but very soon, though trying hard to disguise it, a heavy, hopeless apathy crept over her, alternating, when she was alone, with passionate bursts of acute suffering. Vida's heart interpreted what Ethel was going through, for her thoughts of Winfred had their own pain. He wrote to her very soon, and begged for a speedy answer, and they corresponded regularly; but she missed him very much, and wondered more and more why he had let her go without speaking the words he had made her expect. She thought too that he would come to see her — Huxton was only two hours from Boston; but he did not. In truth he dared not if he meant to keep to his resolution of present silence. He had barely kept to it that last night. And so Vida continued to suffer for the pampering of those faults in his character which he undoubtedly considered signs of manly and laudable self-respect. But her troubles were so trivial compared to Ethel's that she was ashamed to dwell upon them. She tried to find distractions for Ethel, but everything seemed so inadequate. They read together; Ethel did some work with her brush; and Vida began revising the stories Winfred was going to have published.

In this way more than a week passed. It was Sunday evening. The day had been hot, so they had stayed in doors, and after supper were sitting idly in the library.

"Vida," said Ethel, "I want to go to church; I don't know why, I don't go often, but to-night I want to, — not to any of the big churches, but to some place where people are poor, and have n't much to make them happy. Will you go with me?"

They had been out in the evening several times before, so Vida was accustomed to it now, and assented at once. In a few

minutes they were in the street, on the way to the poorer parts of the town, where Ethel thought she could find a little chapel which she remembered. As they turned a corner they heard a babel of noise, in which voices, drums, tambourines, and a melodium united in waking the echoes with what sounded like a most enthusiastic, if unmusical rendition of the "Battle Cry of Freedom."

"What in the world —" began Vida. Then she looked up and saw blazing in illuminated letters over a doorway a little distance ahead the words Salvation Army.

"Vida, would you mind — would you think it very dreadful to go in?" asked Ethel. "I want just to look at those girls' faces."

Vida had arrived at the point of doing almost anything, and was also rather curious to see these people herself.

"Not at all, I'm perfectly willing," she said.

In the narrow vestibule, formed by partitioning off a corner of the hall, stood a man in a red jersey. He was not very clean, and was entirely uninteresting. The singing had ceased, and somebody was evidently in the throes of fervid prayer. The man stopped the girls as they were about to go in. "Wait till the singin' begins," he said, and then added, holding out a paper, "Buy a 'War Cry'?" They declined, at which he looked much disappointed. The drums, the tambourines, the harmonium, and the people burst into vehement execution of "In the Gloaming;" at least it sounded so at first, but the girls soon discovered that the air was merely being utilized in the service of a hymn, only a few words of which they could catch. In addition to the rest of the clamor a tremendous hand-clapping began.

"Now ye kin go in," said the man, and they opened the door and entered a large square hall. The congregation was principally made up of the respectable class of working and small tradespeople, with a scattering of less respectable characters in the back part of the room. The place was well filled, but the girls got seats near the front, nearer than they wished. It was

hot and stuffy, and the odor thereof was not pleasant to sensitive nostrils. The man presiding over the drum was short and fat, red in the face, and animated by an ardor that woke thunder from his terrific instrument. There was a vim about the tambourine girls that would have done credit to any minstrel-show on earth. Where was there anything inspiring or elevating in this shouting mob? What could Margaret and Ethel see in these people but vulgar, demented fanatics? Such were Vida's reflections as she sat disgusted in the midst of the vociferous worshippers. At the top of the hall was a platform filled with men and women, — young women, principally, and girls. The women sat in front, — about two rows of them, — the men, rather less numerous, sat behind. The Salvation Army costume is familiar now to everybody, — the women's dark-blue serge dresses and hideous bonnets decorated with flaming red ribbons inscribed with the words "Salvation Army" in gilt letters, and the men's red jerseys, over which some wear ordinary coats, others military jackets.

It was certainly a remarkable performance from beginning to end. Ethel, having seen it before, knew what to expect; but Vida was completely unprepared. When somewhat recovered from her first repulsion, she began to study details, first noticing the leader or captain, whose face would have been conspicuous among a thousand. She was much superior in every way to her associates. Her features were strong and well moulded, her eyes large, dark, earnest, and softened by long black lashes which curled out over her cheeks. Her fine black hair was brushed straight back, only a narrow edge of it showing under her outlandish bonnet, which, after one got used to it, did not look quite so outlandish, and certainly gave a singularly sweet, womanly expression to the plainest countenance. Vida thought she had never seen such a smile on any human being's face as illumined this girl's; she had never seen such a look of calm, serene joy, such a manner of perfect *selfless* repose and simplicity with an undercurrent of unaggressive strength and confidence. The girl fascinated her. The lieutenant was evidently Scotch, a girl of

coarser fibre but with much of the same repose, simplicity, and confidence in her bearing. She had a bright, intelligent look, and her expression was one of beaming delight. Vida saw, in varying degrees, the same satisfied radiance on nearly all the women's faces, and on many of the men's. Otherwise they were, with two or three exceptions, exclusive of the captain and lieutenant, average commonplace-looking persons of the middle class.

The meeting was opened for "testimonies," which were given by those on the platform and those in the audience indiscriminately. If any sign of lagging appeared, the captain would tell some sister or brother soldier to get up and speak. The order was invariably followed by instantaneous obedience. Some persons inveighed against theatre-going and dancing, some had been redeemed from these pernicious vices, and others from drunkenness, some from evil speaking and doing in general, and some had been delivered from suffering and want. After every testimony, the whole assembly, soldiers and audience, would break into some chorus started by the captain. It was generally set to a familiar mundane tune with a swing to it. In spite of the conglomeration of bigotry, fanaticism, and joviality, Vida could not help realizing that there existed among these people a spirit of harmony which was most unusual, and a feeling of security against the temptations and the hardships of life such as she had never before witnessed. And as to their being happy, the tone of their voices and the calm gleam of their eyes proved it beyond dispute. It was a mystery she could not fathom.

When the "testimonies" were all finished, and the collection had been taken up, the captain opened a Bible and read a few verses which she made the text of a short extemporaneous address. There was an irresistible power, magnetism, what you will, about her. She held the room silent. There were tears in some eyes; there was a glowing light of assent in others. Vida herself was unquestionably moved, though wondering how this girl, so refined and intelligent, so eloquent even, could bear contact with the rougher element about her, and how she

could share all the bigotry in evidence, could actually countenance a personal devil and eternal damnation.

"You can all be happy, and you can all be good," she said, stretching out her arms pleadingly. "There are some here still bound by sin and misery. Come and kneel at the foot of the cross, and let the sin be washed away, and the misery turned to joy. Won't you come?" It was like the voice of a mother calling to her poor, wayward, wilful child. "Won't you come?" In a low voice she began singing to a plaintive air some words commencing, "Resting, resting, I'm resting in the everlasting arms." The soldiers joined in, then the audience, all in a soft undertone. There was a stir among the people, many of whom got up and went out. Vida turned to Ethel, supposing her ready to go. She was leaning over, her forehead bowed upon the back of the chair before her. The seats next the aisle had been vacated. A young Salvationist with an angelic face, the one who played the melodium, left her place, came along the aisle, stepped up to Ethel, and bent down to her. "Are you saved?" she asked.

"I don't know," said Ethel; "I don't understand."

"You are unhappy; will you come to the foot of the cross, and tell it to Jesus? He will give you peace. Will you come?"

"Yes."

She rose. The girl took her hand and led her up to the row of chairs at the foot of the platform and facing the audience. Vida sat stupefied with amazement. The girl told Ethel to kneel, and sank down beside her. "One, there is one poor soul come to find rest," said the captain. "God bless you. Somebody pray."

"Are you a Christian?"

Vida looked around. A man shabbily dressed but clean was leaning towards her across the empty chairs between them.

"Yes; I mean no," she answered confusedly.

"I'm glad ye ain't. If ye was, it'd be agin Christianity. I ain't a Christian myself, but I come in here 'cause it somehow keeps me from bein' a devil."

Vida turned away, resentful of his familiar manner of address. He looked at her scrutinizingly.

"I'm glad ye ain't a Christian. I know a gal about yer age who's gone te the bad. She used te work in a store fur six dollars a week, — six dollars te keep herself and a cripple sister what got smashed under a dray. Two gals can't live on six dollars a week, 'specially when one's a cripple and ought te have medcines and good victuals; so the one as was n't crippled had te pervide more; and there's only one way fur a gal to do it, and she done it. She was a sweet, pretty gal onct, and as modest as any woman; now she's gittin' hard, and her good looks is goin' fast."

Why was this dreadful man telling her such a story? It was terrible for the girl, terrible; but how could she help it?

"Six dollars a week fur standin' behind a counter sellin' them fine things you've got on, and don't have te work fur so much as ten minutes a day. I ain't blamin' ye; if I'd a-started as ye did, I'd a-ben 'jist the same, I guess; but somethin's wrong somewhere when one gal gits all the fine clothes and food and good times without liftin' a finger, and t'other gits all the starvation and work. I'm glad ye ain't a Christian; I'd think Christianity a might poor thing if ye could stand seein' things as they be."

"What can I do for this poor girl?"

"Oh, nothin', it's too late now. I'd a-helped her if I could; but I've got a family te look out fur, and now I'm most as bad off myself 'cept that I ain't a woman."

The man made Vida feel very uncomfortable. She looked away from him over to the "penitent form." Ethel was still kneeling, and beside her, at the next chair, was a girl who had sat before them. Vida had noticed the intense, strained look on her face. She was dressed in cheap finery, which displayed, however, some taste; but it had become time-worn and soiled.

"Well," said the man, following the direction of Vida's eyes, "she's got there, poor thing! She's ben comin' here

fur weeks, and she's ben under conviction, as they say. P'rhaps I'll git there myself by-and-by. I don't know, it do give 'em peace, and it takes the devil out of 'em. Good-evenin', I must be gittin' home."

"Good-evening," said Vida.

One of the Salvation girls came towards her, stopped, and, sitting down on the next seat, laid her hand on her shoulder. "Are you saved?" she asked gently. There was the sweet, calm, *salvation* look in her eyes.

"No," said Vida, "I don't suppose so."

"Won't you get saved to-night?" said the girl, and in a subdued voice began pleading with her to decide now before it was too late, and she was doomed to everlasting torment.

Vida was annoyed, but did not like to repulse the girl, she was so tender and so much in earnest. Just then Ethel raised her head. It seemed as though a light of heavenly glory had broken into the room, and were shining full upon her face. "It's done," she said, gazing upwards with wide-opened, tear-dimmed eyes. Wonder and awe were in her tones.

Vida got up. "I must go to my friend," she said, and the Salvation girl sadly let her pass. Vida made her way to the front. Both Ethel and the girl in cheap finery had risen, and the soldiers and some of the audience were pressing around them. Ethel looked at Vida and smiled, such a strange, beautiful smile.

"We'll go home now," she said.

They heard the other girl say a little wistfully to one of the "sisters": "I—I have n't any home, not anywhere I—I want to go now. I s'pose I'll find some place to stay te-night."

"You've no place to sleep?" asked Ethel, turning to her.

"No, ma'am."

"Then come with us."

She looked incredulous. "Come," repeated Ethel, taking her by the hand, and the three girls, the poor waif, the talented young artist, and the society belle, went down the street together, surely a most incongruous group.

When they reached the house Ethel led the way to the library, and her *protégée* began her story at once. Till it was related she would not even take off her hat.

"I can't stay here till ye know about me," she said, "then — p'rhaps ye won't want me. I can't ever be the same after te-night, and I'm goin' te begin by bein' honest with ye."

"You may tell us about yourself if you wish," said Ethel ; "but we'll keep you whatever it may be."

"My name's Jennie McFarlan. I was a work-girl in a factory, — a silk factory in Hoboken."

Vida started. "Whose factory?" she asked, though knowing there was but one, — her father's.

"Mr. Gordon Radcliffe's, the big New York millionaire."

Vida signed Ethel to say nothing.

"Factory work 's bad anywhere ; but in his factory they keep the pay down the lowest they can, and the hours is long, and they're awful hard on ye fur any slip in yer work. He's a hard man, Mr. Radcliffe, and the foreman has te do his orders and keep the girls drove all the time. I was n't one of the steady ones, I was always fond uf things I'd no business te be fond uf, — I know it sense I've ben goin' te the meetin', — dressin' and dancin' and amusin' myself with worldly things."

This time Ethel wisely restrained Vida, who was on the point of protesting against this view of the case.

"It led me straight down te hell, and I tried te think it made me happy. I've found the Lord te-night, and I know fur the first time in my life what it is te be happy, — happy all through ye without a thing te wish fur or be afraid uf. That's why I can tell ye all about it. Girls git tired uf workin' hard and not gittin' enough te keep yerself decent, much less help them as needs yer help. And it is n't always jist the pretty things and the pleasures that makes girls go wrong. Ma got ill ; the children was hungry ; and I was drove te death, and could n't do nothin' fur 'em with it all."

She stopped and her face crimsoned ; but she drew herself together and went on.

“Not very long before that a young gentleman come over te the factory with the son of Mr. Radcliffe. People often go through te see it. He was older than the Radcliffe young gentleman. They happened te stop at my place, and asked me some questions. Mr. — the other one — would n’t go, he — he stayed there talkin’ a long time, stoppin’ my work, which meant so much out uf the day’s earnin’.”

Again she paused, then forced herself to go on.

“I need n’t tell how it all come about, jist the way it does with all the rest. I don’t think he meant no harm at first; but men ain’t that way long, and what becomes of us don’t matter. He gave me pretty things, and money fur ma and the children, and — and I got te care fur him in the kind uf way I never cared fur nobody else. Ma was that low she jist took all I give her, and never wondered where it come from — till one day she found out. A woman seen me with him, and guessed it all, and went and told her. She turned me out uf the house, and I never seen her since — poor ma.”

“What became of you?” It was Vida who asked. Way down at the bottom of everything was her father responsible for this girl’s fall?

“He kep’ me till he got tired, till ten months ago; then he gave me two hundred dollars, and tole me te write te him if I ever needed help. He was n’t so heartless as most uf ’em. I kep’ his address; but I never asked nothin’ uf him.”

“Where did you go; what did you do?”

“I could n’t bear te stay in New York, where ma and the children was, so I come here. I felt so low I had no thought uf its ever bein’ possible fur me te be different again, and my heart was nearly broke because uf him; I could ’a’ died fur him if he’d ’a’ asked me. I was reckless and out uf the way uf workin’, and I had two hundred dollars; so I jist lived as they all do, and tried te forgit.”

That was the story, as old and common place and sad as thousands of others just like it, as the one Vida had heard that very night.

"I went into the Army meetin' onct when I could n't forgit, and I never rested again. I was under conviction from the first ; but it took me three weeks to git courage to go up and now " — her face expressed the depth of her feelings — " now I 'm at rest."

She put her hand in her pocket and took out a small dilapidated Bible. " A lady in the Sunday-school gave me that when I was a little girl. I never cared fur it much ; but the bindin' was pretty then, and I kep' it. I 've ben readin' it since I began to go to the Army ; and it 's jist beautiful in the parts ye can understand. Now I 've told ye everythin', and — and — I suppose — "

Girls reared beyond knowledge of sin and degradation feel an unspeakable shrinking when first brought in contact with them, no matter how pathetic the aspect in which they appear. Vida recoiled from the girl instinctively, but the sadness of the story, the connection of her own father with the girl's fate, were a powerful counter-influence, and she controlled all signs of the repulsion she could not help feeling. Ethel only experienced infinite pity. She was in such a condition as to be sensible only to the misery of this fellow-creature.

" I told you we 'd keep you with us. It 's late ; come, I 'll take you up to your room."

Ethel was upstairs a long time. When she came down, she found Vida sitting where she had left her, deep in thought. She knelt before her, put her arms about her, and laid her head down on her knee.

" Vida, I don't understand, I can't tell what it is ; but something happened when I was there in the Army hall, it went through me in a second, a feeling so wonderful, so strange, and now — I can bear it all."

In the morning Vida was the first to enter the library. She saw the factory girl's worn Bible lying on the floor, and picked it up. As she did so a slip of dirty paper fell out. In replacing it her eyes caught the writing upon it — the name Frank Vaughn and an address which she did not know.

CHAPTER XVII.

“ ETHEL, you can’t believe as these people do ; you can’t possibly believe all their mummified theories and doctrines ! Do you believe them ? ”

“ No, I don’t. I have n’t gone back to the Middle Ages.”

“ Then how can you think for a moment — how can you — Ethel, tell me you don’t mean it.”

It was a week after Ethel’s experience in the Salvation Army hall. Nearly every evening since she had gone to the meetings, and Vida had set aside her own feelings and accompanied her. Jennie McFarlan had gone, too. They had kept the girl with them, both determined to help her by every means in their power. She was filled with gratitude, and made all the return she could by taking most of the housework upon herself, albeit under direction, her knowledge of the requirements of a well-ordered establishment being nil. Jennie was happy, beamingly happy, and entirely metamorphosed from the forlorn creature of a week before. They had bought her some necessary clothes, — at her own request the plainest possible ; she had ruthlessly brushed back her very abundant crimps, — forever, she said ; and her neat appearance and bright, pretty face made it hard to indentify her with the unfortunate victim of starvation wages and the easy ethics of her destroyer. She was certainly regenerated most thoroughly ; but Vida thought she could understand her case, though the suddenness of the change remained a puzzling feature. Otherwise it was perfectly comprehensible. Being ignorant and credulous, Jennie accepted the whole theological plan of salvation, and rested serenely upon it. But how

explain Ethel? Ethel could not even explain herself. Just as surely as Jennie she had come into a state of calm, deep peace, and of quiet but very apparent exaltation.

"How do you know it will last, Ethel?" asked Vida.

"I don't know it," said Ethel; "but I can't imagine its going."

"How do you think it happened?"

"I don't know that, either. Perhaps I'll understand some day. I know what you're thinking," she added, seeing Vida's eyes fixed upon her. "I have n't stopped, — stopped caring for him; but the pain is taken out of it, and I can think now only of his happiness. Vida," she said, after a moment, "it must be the feeling old Mrs. Grey has. I love everybody, and I only want to help people get what I've got."

Vida thought of the theory of emotional excitation, and it seemed plausible. If it were correct, of course Ethel's present condition would gradually subside, and leave her as she was before. Vida was very thankful for Ethel's respite from suffering, still she looked at her with troubled eyes. "Ethel," she asked, "are you in earnest; do you mean what you say; do you mean that you intend to give up everything, — your painting, your ambitions, your friends, and join these people? You can't be serious! Think of those rough, uneducated creatures, with their horrible drums and tambourines, — think of associating with them all the time! And they'll expect you to talk their jargon; you can't do that."

"It will all come right somehow."

"What will your father and mother say, and all the rest? They'll be utterly wretched."

"No, Vida, you don't understand us. We don't believe in interfering with each other; and we're perfectly satisfied to have every one do as he pleases. Don't try to dissuade me; it's the only life I can live now. If I turned from it, I'd be more miserable than ever."

Vida said no more. It was Sunday again. In the afternoon Ethel and Jennie went to the meeting; but Vida stayed home.

She was beginning to hate the dreadful Salvation hall and all its accompaniments. She was too distressed about Ethel to read or interest herself in anything; but after a while sat down to answer a letter Frank Vaughn had written asking if he might come to Boston to see her. She had been trying to bring herself to the task for three days. Her note was very brief and uncompromising. She thought of him with such absolute loathing, she could not even use the conventional form of address.

"Mr. Vaughn," she wrote, "I have accidentally come across a young girl named Jennie McFarlan. I know her story, and by chance discovered your connection with it. It is unnecessary for me to say that owing to these circumstances our acquaintance is entirely at an end. VIDA RADCLIFFE."

He was not an inherently bad man, only a selfish one whose principal faults had been developed by idleness, a large allowance, and the world's leniency towards man in general and young and wealthy man in particular. On receiving Vida's note, he had the grace to be ashamed of himself; and, his conscience not being yet dead, he also felt some sharp pangs on Jennie's account. For a whole week he wished he had been truer and nobler, wished it intermittently for a month. He loved Vida deeply, and to win and hold her love would have given up every vice he had ever cultivated. At her first rejection he had suffered keenly. This second blow unmanned him. His ideal of life was not lofty enough, and he had not moral fibre enough to learn the lesson which the blow could have taught, and commence a determined effort to redeem that higher self not yet crushed under the weight of the lower. Instead of this a new impetus was added to a career of dissipation which gradually undermined all that was fine and worthy in him. Whose fault was it? His father's, who had never disciplined him, or taught him any strong principles of right? His mother's, who thought indulgence the only mark of maternal love? Society's, that made vice so easy and pleasant to him? Or his own, because he did not in himself supply the moral deficiencies of father, mother, and society?

After having written the note, Vida did not know what to do next. She was restless, and decided to go out. She remembered reading about some man who was to give an address that afternoon at a Unitarian church near by. He had been attracting much attention by a series of religious non-sectarian lectures which he was delivering. Vida thought she would go and hear him, partly out of curiosity, partly to have an object in view. She would post her note at the same time. She wanted to be rid of it, and the whole noxious recollection of Frank Vaughn. It was a little late when she reached the church. As she was shown to a seat, a medium-sized, striking-looking man entered the pulpit. She was near enough to take critical note of his personality. He was perhaps forty years of age, and suggested an Oriental strain of lineage. He had the dark Oriental skin, black hair, and a fine, not very heavy black beard. His forehead was prominent, his face long and thin, with remarkable width between the eyes. The eyes were very dark, and very large, with a luminous glow in them. He stood perfectly motionless, facing the congregation. Externally the repose of his bearing and expression was almost trance-like, and yet something went forth from him, some personal aura that seemed to diffuse itself throughout the whole building and bring everybody at once under his influence. He silently bowed his head for a moment, then opened his discourse.

“There is but one God, there are many religions ; there is but one principle of Truth, there are doctrines almost as many as the sands of the shore. The object of religion is to furnish an avenue of connection between the spiritual man and his source, God, — to develop the spiritual nature and establish its rule in man’s life.

“The word spirituality is obscured by several different and, for the most part, contradictory definitions. I use it to-day in its religious, which I claim is its only true, sense. Man, as we know him in this earthly environment, is threefold in his nature, — physical, intellectual, and spiritual. Physically he is capable of corruption, intellectually of perversion. The spiritual man is without disease or sin.

“To one who has no personal conviction of the spiritual element of being, it is very difficult to make a satisfactory statement of its existence. It is difficult because of the inadequacy of material methods of investigation to deal with a subject for which those methods are not fitted. ‘The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned.’ The materialist must have the evidence of the senses; the spiritualist can only furnish the evidence of inner experience, culminating, instead of beginning, in external manifestation. But at least most persons admit that another centre of consciousness than that of the animal nature or of the intellectual faculty seems roused to activity when the heart thrills responsive to some lofty thought, some beautiful poem or picture, some heroic deed, some grand renunciation, whenever man forgets his egotism and comes into harmony with the ideal. It is in this centre of consciousness that we must seek the spiritual, eternal man.

“Some persons confound morality with spirituality, but the two things are distinct. The latter includes the former; but the former does not include the latter. Morality is a matter of education; spirituality is a fact of being. Morality is based upon an intellectual conception of popular justice and virtue, and varies in different countries and different stages of civilization and conditions of society. Spirituality is governed by fixed principles, immutable in all stages of civilization, whether it be recognized or not. Morality is cold and severe; spirituality is tender, inspiring. A strictly moral man may be narrow, fanatical, and even cruel. A spiritual man, when of small intellectual capacity, may be theoretically narrow and bigoted, but cannot be cruel. He is inherently charitable and loving. Morality is human; spirituality is divine. Morality is philosophical in character; spirituality is religious.

“Every man and woman has experienced that constant warfare between their evil propensities and their virtuous aspirations. In one who has awakened to a personal realization of the spiritual side of being, the antagonism between these two forces becomes

more constant and more marked. The spiritual nature is at variance, not only with every evil desire of the natural, selfish man, but with his every instinct of self-seeking, self-aggrandizement, and self-assertion. The lower nature hates every principle of the aspiring, self-sacrificing, spiritual man. Between them stands the intellect, the servant of the one or the other, as the one or the other is in the ascendant.

“To the natural man, the spiritual life is repellant in its self-abnegation, robbed of all light and pleasure, all music and flowers. The spiritual man knows that the spiritual life is filled with ecstasy so supreme that the intensest joys of self-gratification are as mere dreams compared to it. These two sides of man are governed respectively by the only two general principles of human life, each diametrically opposed to the other, — the selfish and the selfless. One principle must be wrong, and the other right; one must be founded in error, and the other founded in truth. How shall judgment be passed upon them? If a principle is true, its practice must produce orderly and harmonious results; its violation, results of confusion and discord. Viewing man's life filled with its sin, failures, misery, we ask: ‘Is its principle true?’ Theoretically man has in general recognized himself as a spiritual being. Practically he has acted on premises which assume the physical man to be the real, and the spiritual a mere incomprehensible essence which can only attain distinct, individualized existence after the change called death. Man's free will has chosen that the body and the intellect shall be supreme, and the spiritual nature subordinate, often wholly ignored, and sometimes even denied. But in that centre of consciousness responsive only to the highest and holiest inspiration, the divine, imperishable ego still dwells, and always will dwell, unchanged and unchangeable, biding its time, uttering its plea in every protest of truth, of justice, of purity, in every prompting of pity and love. Not always apparently, but nevertheless unceasingly, it labors to establish its rightful sovereignty under guidance of the will of the All Father Spirit and the jurisdiction of His laws. It testifies by a vitality which no degree of wrong

can quite crush out, that man cannot be destroyed, and can never be committed to eternal evil. And any other conclusion would be opposed to the whole logic of nature which changes and develops, but never annihilates or leaves anything in irredeemable pollution. There are certain laws of right, founded upon an immutable principle of harmonious being, and the breaking of those laws means violation of the principle, and consequent, though sometimes long-delayed, disaster to the violator. Repeated disaster must finally convince him that the law is stronger than he, and cannot safely be trifled with. After ten, a hundred, or a thousand years, that man, if only in sheer exhaustion, must adjust himself to the laws operating in and upon him for his ultimate salvation, and the salvation of all creation. If in sinning there were no violation of law, there would be no suffering, because there would be no friction; if there were no suffering, there would be no turning back to the law. When suffering begins to result from a man's evil deeds, the first movement of his regeneration has occurred. The natural man may resist as long as his obstinacy and power of endurance hold out; but the action of the law he cannot escape. My friends, it is for you, for me, for every individual to determine when we will cease 'kicking against the pricks,' and let the reign of the spiritual man commence in our lives. It is well to face the fact that when it does commence we shall enter upon a period of struggle and agony, as we die daily, inch by inch, to the resisting Self, raising up its legions of desires, passions, and sophistries for our temptation and defeat. And we shall have trials and tribulations, mockings and scourgings from our fellow-men, probably lack of worldly prosperity; for we shall enter into direct antagonism with all the cherished lies, and false principles of a material, self-absorbed humanity, we shall have adjusted our lives to a set of principles in complete contradiction to the governing ones of self-interest. Yet if we begin to-day, we shall discount twenty-four hours of suffering, which will surely be added if we wait till to-morrow; three hundred and sixty-five days, if we wait till next year; and so on through time, till we make the choice.

‘Verily, verily, I say unto thee thou shalt not come out from thence till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.’

“I speak with great positiveness about this question of law, and you may naturally ask on what authority. In answer I ask: Can anything be done well in defiance of law, and can anything ill done be done in conformity with law? If the artist would paint a fine picture, and make its creating a delight, not a drudgery, he must work, consciously or unconsciously, in harmony with the laws governing his art. The musician, the poet, the scientist, the mathematician, the humble toiler in the fields, and the servant in the kitchen, are all under the same necessity in regard to their particular branch of labor. Nothing in life can be accomplished with pleasure and success except in exact proportion to the observance of governing laws. An absolutely perfect compliance with law would obviously produce easy and faultless expression along all lines of material or intellectual activity. The same statement is true of conduct. In exact proportion as the laws of Truth and Love are observed, harmony is established in the life, and success and happiness are assured. This assertion does not contradict anything I have said before. Success and ease do not come while the practice of a law is being learned, but only after a certain facility of execution has been acquired. Up to that point its discipline is painful, and its value often remains undemonstrated. And there is another fact to recognize. Suffering being the result of lawlessness, each act of lawlessness must reap its legitimate fruit or suffering. Repentance will prevent additional wrong-doing and its resultant pain, — it cannot subvert the immutable principle of cause and effect, and annul the consequences of past wrong-doing. Sow the wind, and you must reap the whirlwind of that sowing. You cannot escape that dread harvesting, not if you could hide yourself in the deepest bowels of the earth, or dissolve yourself into impalpable ether. Everything is lawless that cannot withstand the test of Truth and Love. Every assumption of pride is lawless; every thought of impurity, every impulse of selfishness, every feeling of anger, of condemna-

tion, of impatience, every wish of retaliation, however we may excuse and justify them to ourselves, are lawless. Provocation does not make them less so, does not change or modify the principle and render its violation lawful. But high-motived opposition to wrong is not to be confounded with personal rancor at individual injury. In the cause of Truth, it may enter into the province of Love to thwart and punish perversity, to antagonize prejudice, and even to offend and wound ignorance. There is no real love manifested in fostering sin or error. The highest love is always and ever loyal to Truth. My friends, if we are true to God, God will be true to us ; and by God I mean principle. We are not meant to live in turmoil and contention, but in peace. We can never live in peace till we adjust our lives to true principles. Then," the speaker's eyes glowed and his voice vibrated, — " then let your neighbor slander you ; let your brother rob you ; let the world persecute you ; let every material blessing depart from you ; let your soul be racked by your own warring passions and lusts, — the conviction that you are in the right seizes upon and abides with you forever. You recognize the pathways of Truth ; and beneath the suffering of the old, mortal, dying man flows steadily a deep undercurrent of ineffable, unending joy, — a joy we may lose sight of in the anguish of the struggling lower nature, but which will never fail us if we claim it, — never, even in the hour of our keenest pain, if we turn and grasp it. Oh, the joy of Law's wondrous harmonies ! The peace of meekness and patience, the warm glow of kindness, the sweetness of purity, the deep satisfaction of truth and honesty, the infinite bliss of giving, of comforting, of loving ! No longer strife and disobedience, but union with God, the aim, the end, and the rapture of life, — a rapture no soul can understand who has not known it, which none who have felt it for a day, an hour, a minute only, can find language superlative enough and lofty enough to express ! In that one brief minute the soul realizes once and for all that Good, not Sin, is its natural estate. That holy ecstasy, the ' peace which passeth all understanding ' enters into the life, the first fruits of obedience

to law. Such results following the imperfect obedience of the only partially victorious spiritual man, still hampered by the evil and tried by the suffering of the rebellious, natural man, presage a state of happiness far beyond our present power to imagine when, the battle ended, evil shall lie conquered at our feet and fade even from memory, like the impalpable shapes of a moment's nightmare.

"Thus far I have only spoken of man's own action in the matter, of his power of choice. With all reverent humility I would now try to gain some understanding of the action of God, — the Eternal Cause, the Sustaining Life, the Governing Principle, the great incomprehensible Marvel of the universe to whom we bow down in awe, to whom we appeal in despair, and whom the liberated, spiritual man loves in childlike trust and adoring gratitude.

"What is God? No human tongue can answer, — indefinable by mortal speech, incomprehensible to mortal mind, — Life, Consciousness, Intelligence, Power, Truth, Love, Law, Principle. We pick words in our feeble effort to explain the inexplicable, and find we are only limiting the limitless to our own small human conception of being and might.

"There are a few facts which we feel we may claim to know, — that a universe exists and must have a cause back of it; that we — the highest form of creation of which we are cognizant — that we live and, so far as can be seen, by no intention, or volition, or action of our own. 'And God said, let us make man.' Take the story of creation literally or allegorically, as you choose, by what process of evolution man came into existence it does not now concern us to inquire. God, the creative force, made man; from the time of his conception, — long before it, perhaps, in other spheres of life, — through the whole course of man's existence, God always has made and always is making him. The gift of free will has left man at liberty to choose whether his perfect making shall be accomplished quickly or slowly, easily or painfully. In other words, will he comply willingly with God's plan of perfect growth, or

will he resist till forced to compliance by suffering? The reformation of any one sinner, the changing of a drunkard into a sober man, a thief into an honest man, of a quarrelsome, envious, revengeful character into a sweet and gentle one, demonstrate a hidden force at work upon the self-distorted nature, appealing to, arousing, and fortifying the spiritual man to the conquering and subduing of the sin and sense bound natural man. It is only when the ceaseless action of the divine forces of Truth and Love have brought the human will into some degree of accord with the divine will that the spiritual nature attains sufficient self-consciousness to assert itself and claim the leadership under God. At least some of us here to-day can recall two or three, or perhaps just one person of our acquaintance in whose tender unselfishness we see a phase of peaceful, happy life, as rare and incomprehensible to the average mortal as it is beautiful. And it is almost certain this person holds what are called orthodox views. There are many people of no religious tendencies (I use the word religious now in its ordinary, restricted meaning) who lead moral, noble lives, but lack the peculiar serenity and content of this sweet soul, — a repose which no surrounding discord or personal trouble seem able to disturb. There is an orderliness in his or her life which argues not only an unusual subjection of the lower propensities, — this a merely moral person of strong will may also attain, — but manifests that rare gentleness and holiness which belong essentially to the spiritual nature. And yet very likely this person is of small mental capacity, and may be more or less bigoted. Viewing such a case, the first superficial conclusion of the modern sceptic is that to an inferior order of mentality alone is this spiritual life possible, and he contemptuously sneers at the life because of the intellectual deficiencies of its followers. Let us look at the matter a moment. Thus far religion and orthodoxy have been so confounded as to become inseparably connected in the general mind. Among the more independent thinkers religion has consequently fallen into disrepute, and spirituality, the foundation upon which religion rests, is regarded as a foolish myth. Dealing merely with the western

civilization we may say that till recently the orthodox have been, with few exceptions, the only persons who believe in the spiritual nature of man, and desire the spiritual life. They alone strive for, and therefore they alone attain it. So long as a person's fanaticism leads to uncharitableness and cruelty, he can never realize the spiritual life. An inquisitor may be a thoroughly moral man; he can never be a spiritually awakened man while remaining an inquisitor. But even a bigot who loves the sinner, who pities and excuses while trying to reform the wrongdoer, is acting from the spiritual side in accordance with spiritual laws, however befogged his mind may be by doctrine. Ignorant compliance with law accomplishes the same results as conscious compliance.

"We are now confronted with the question: To what law are these sweet, sanctified lives attuned? The law of self-surrender, my friends, and its motto is, 'Thy will not mine be done.' Creed has nothing to do with it; theology, orthodoxy, or unorthodoxy have nothing to do with it. You can conform to it in a Roman Catholic cathedral, a Presbyterian or Unitarian church, a Jewish synagogue, a Buddhist temple; you can adjust yourself to it without aid of doctrine, priest, or altar, by the simple response of your soul to God's presence within. 'Thy will not mine be done.'

"I have seen persons kneel down in some religious assembly, sin, remorse, and longing for redemption racking their hearts with anguish. I have seen them rise from their knees entirely transformed. In labor-throes of the soul the divine ego is born into conscious life. The theologian, with his theory of a personal Saviour and vicarious suffering, explains it as an arbitrary act of Providence, who atoned for the penitent's sins long before they were committed, and now simply blots them out of existence. We have no knowledge of any development in nature that does not require a preceding epoch of preparation. The order of nature is not departed from in spiritual things. Time and experience must ripen the spiritual ego for its hour of deliverance; the spiritual birth is the culmination of a process of spiritual generation. As in Paul's case, the birth may occur

with sudden and convulsing violence, but the experiences of his previous life, the knowledge these had brought, and the soul development they had worked, silently and unseen, had prepared him for the hour of that astonishing change, which otherwise could not possibly have occurred. In many of us this re-birth may happen so quietly and gradually that we never know it is accomplished until some unfamiliar sweetness stirs our hearts, some unfamiliar note of gladness echoes through our souls, and we realize that a different man and a different woman, with different tastes, needs, desires, ideals, have replaced the old selves we thought we were. And moreover, my friends, the divinest man who ever shed the light of His example upon this earth did not come in defiance of law to save you and me or any one else from the lawful consequences of our sins. He came to show us the way to redeem those sins ourselves, — a way absolutely independent of doctrinal belief and ecclesiastical tenets. Others than Jesus the Christ have also pointed the way, but none so clearly as He, because none so simply. But had no guide ever been given us, the *way* would still exist, and still be open to all who would walk therein, — Christian, Jew, Mahometan, heathen. The Father has not reserved the highway of salvation for any one class or sect of men. The passwords, 'Thy will not mine be done,' give the freedom of the road to all who utter them. The instant those words break from the yearning heart, — an instant prepared for, led up to, perhaps through years of sinning and resultant suffering, — we level the barrier of self clogging the avenue between our souls and their source. Then that incomprehensible power, that almighty Love called God, flows in upon and revivifies the life He has created, and the man is verily born again, born a spiritual child of the kingdom of heaven, — a child, not a full-grown spiritual being, a babe with all the dangers and weaknesses of immaturity confronting it. Through these dangers and weaknesses he will pass triumphantly, if he hold firm to the Father's hand, and submit to the Father's discipline. If in fear or impatience he break loose, and heed the tempting voice of the natural man whispering the old false allure-

ments in his ear, some time, as soon or as late as he wills, the agony of that birth-hour must be lived through again, and with added pangs of horror and remorse. The phenomenon commonly called conversion is no myth. It is an orderly, inevitable event which must take place in the natural course of the soul's development. It cannot be prevented any more than can the infant's growth into a child, and the child's into an adult. It is the beginning of the true life on a true basis, governed by the true principles of absolute Good.

"My friends, let us to-day be honest with ourselves; let us look upon ourselves as we are. We will lay bare our souls in the light of glaring Truth, probe pitilessly into their most hidden recesses. What a disclosure! The weakness, the pettiness, the meanness, the hypocrisy lurking in the corners, writhing like noisome reptiles of the dark under the sudden flash of a sunbeam! We turn sick at sight of the brood we have nourished. We look further. Sin after sin, pain after pain, misery after misery, horror after horror, rise up remorseless witnesses of what we have been, what we are. With a shudder and cry of agony we drag the cover back over our tortured souls, and dash out into the hurrying crowd of the world, reeling, choking, wanting only one thing, — forgetfulness.

"How many dare take such a look into the awful depths of their past, the awful depths of their present? Few of us have committed crimes, forged, pillaged, murdered. But are we not every one of us under the control of some foible, some sin, some evil quality, some vice? Some of us would give our life blood to die free of the curse, have tried over and over to liberate ourselves from its bondage, loathed it, fought with it, crushed it down, and seen it rise again, our master, once more endured the infamy of bowing to the dictates of envy, of spite, of temper, of pride, of liquor, of opium, of lust, of the gambler's fever, of the thousand demons we men and women hate as our tyrants, but obey. Most of us resist them more or less, a few bravely all our lives, and gain victories if we also meet defeats. But even the strongest and most successful say it has been a hard, uncertain battle.

What of the man who has not resisted? The appetite indulged for years has become a foe he is as helpless to cope with as an infant; the violent temper, the envious disposition, the fault-finding discontent he has yielded to have grown utterly beyond his control. Ah, my friends, not only that man's case, but your case, my case, spite of all the moral purpose that animates us, and the effort of will we may put forth, would be hopeless if there were no help outside ourselves. We cannot save ourselves; but we can choose to *let* God save us. At last that solemn moment comes when, helpless, prostrated, we recognize our own weakness, give up the struggle in our own strength, and submit ourselves to the quickening action of the Spirit upon our souls. Then is the birth time of the spiritual man, the hour of redemption and salvation. Do you want this re-birth now? Do you want to commence this new life yet? The Master has shown us that its course lies down a road of stones and thorns whereon the feet will often totter and the heart often sink, and it leads through Gethsemane to Calvary and the Cross. From the human heart goes up a cry: 'My God, what shall I do to be saved?' and out of the silence speaks a voice: 'Take up thy cross and follow me,' — that cross upon which we are to nail with our own hands each impurity, each untruth, each fault of character, each selfish desire whose lying promises of happiness have lured us into this labyrinth of wrong and wretchedness; that cross where Self must hang crucified till the soul, echoing the Nazarene's words, cries in the last torment of perishing egotism: 'It is finished.' But on that road God walks beside us, over the anguish of the last struggle He sheds the soft light of peace and the bright glow of joy. So learns the man who trusts, aspires, and in the blackest hour still murmurs, 'Thy will be done,' — Thy laws honored, Thy principles of Truth and Love obeyed. Only to the spiritually awakened man is this possible, — never to the merely intellectual man, not even to the merely moral man.

"Man has tried his own way, has followed his own will, has pursued his self-interest a long, long time. To-day bitterness

and hatred, desperation and revenge, conditions of danger such as the world has never known before, confront him as results. He still ignores, derides, or palliates them. How will he cure them? Men and women here to-day, do you understand, do you realize that our life is reared on a principle rotten at the foundation? When the superstructure grows too heavy for the unsound base longer to sustain it, what will avert the crash? Diplomacy and legislation? Tariff reform, protection, silver bills, free coinage, democracy, republicanism? What will disarm Europe, and lift the burden laid by mutual fear upon the weary hearts of peoples crushed down by the insupportable weight of militarism? What will insure France, Spain, Italy, against the deadly rancor of the dynamite assassin? If a principle is false, can all the patching and scheming, arbitrating and legislating, repressing and punishing, make its results other than evil? Can they *always* avert a day of reckoning, a day perhaps of maddening, horrifying collapse, when, too late, man will cry in agonized entreaty: 'Thy will not mine be done,'—Thy Truth and Love reign, my selfishness perish forever! Is the millennium to be built upon the mangled remnant of social wreck?

"Perhaps this sounds to you like the wild ravings of a crazy alarmist. 'There is nothing new,' you say, 'in the egotism of man raging with and against himself in moneyed despotism, in political corruption, in class hatred. These things have existed since a history of man has existed; and we still go on, in the main, prospering and advancing.' Yes, but these things have never before existed in such universally virulent form, and so simultaneously in all parts of the world. The superstructure of our social system of self-interest is getting very heavy.

"We have prospered; we have advanced. The world is in many respects much better to-day than it was five hundred, two hundred years ago. Experience and wider knowledge have somewhat checked the brute instincts of human nature. The Spirit of God, keeping alive the divine ego in the soul of man, has steadily influenced him to better and higher ends.

At last have resulted the wonderful attention to spiritual things apparent within the last ten years, and the correlative manifestation of extraordinary philanthropy. But all this exists side by side with the worst phases of sensuality and materialism, self-interested greed and cruelty. The antagonism between good and evil is more clearly patent, and the line between them more distinctly drawn, than ever before. In the life of the individual we find portrayed the life of the race. The protest of the spiritual man, long subordinated to the natural, can only be heard when the natural man's evil has involved him in a situation of desperation. Will the natural man recognize that the day of his rule is over, and give place voluntarily to the spiritual man, see his rapacious plans swept aside, his base schemes overturned, his corrupt principle of Self dethroned? Or will he resist till brought to his knees, facing the final climax wrought by the relentless law of cause and effect? — God's law which, in spite of ourselves, saves us, the sinning, suffering children of His love, from the eternal damnation of our own self-will. Progress is God's order, however misleading the appearance of action and reaction may be to shortsightedness, — progress is His order, and the era of spiritual consciousness and spiritual supremacy must, of necessity, dawn upon this world which the monster of Self has made an arena of prize-fighters and a slaughter-house for the butchering of the weak and helpless. The idealist's dream of altruism carries in itself prophecy of its future reality; the life of a Confucius, a Buddha, a Jesus, is proof of the race-capacity for Godlikeness. Already the light of the new day glimmers in the east, discernible to the eye clear enough, and strong enough, to pierce through the clouds of lingering darkness. And this is not merely a symbol, or rather, as with all true symbols, it embodies an actual truth. Belief in those occult higher powers of man which India has always maintained despite her long degradation; belief in the conscious uniting of man with God, his source, — these beliefs are penetrating the practical mind of the West, and preparing western civilization to respond to the revivifying influence of the Spirit. The great soul of the West is being stirred at the centre,

is beginning to feel the deep throbs of the spirit within ; and the day is at hand when, realizing those mystical facts of life, its energy and prosperity will unite with the spiritual understanding of the East, and of the union will be evolved the highest life yet known to humanity. If you would hasten the dawn of the new day, turn your back to the night-shadows around you, and travel east to meet it."

He had spoken throughout slowly and very quietly. There had been little change of tone, no bursts of impassioned ardor. Yet when he finished, clasped his hands as they hung before him, and bowed his head, not a person stirred, not a sound broke the great hushed silence. The people sat mute, motionless, as people who had been led into the very presence of God.

Vida walked home unheeding the way she went or the persons she passed. Margaret had touched upon some points of which this man had spoken of; Winfred had touched upon others; but neither had shown her life's spiritual realities. Their revelation marked for her a period of new thought and development. She never said another word to dissuade Ethel from the purpose which she had so combated.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE house was literally packed. It had been sold out a week in advance. It was a brilliant audience. The critics were there in full force, a perfect phalanx of them. All the intellectual world was there, and as much of the fashionable as had returned to town. The name Winfred Grey had become a battle-cry for the former, and a fad with the latter. The intellectual community turned out to see something splendidly original and daring, the fashionable to ape the interest and pose in the guise of the intellectual. Seated near the middle of the parquet were two men who might belong to the brotherhood of brains, but certainly had not the remotest connection with that of the *beau monde*. They were both rather seedy. One had a keen, intelligent face and a nervous manner which bespoke him a gentleman of some excitability and not much self-control.

In the left proscenium box sat an old lady and gentleman who seemed somewhat out of place in the glare of the theatre. They were a striking couple; she had a countenance of such sweet serenity, he such a royal air of patriarchal grandeur. They were aliens to the gauds and shows of metropolitan life, and had only ventured into their midst to partake of the glory of their son's triumph. It was a supreme moment to them with something awful in it — waiting the ringing up of the curtain on this only son's play. For the first time in many years the old lady felt her blindness to be a hardship.

In the box with Mr. and Mrs. Grey were Margaret, Clyde, and Gerard, all having come to New York for the occasion. Back out of view of the audience sat Vida. She did not wish to be seen, for she knew too many people present, any one of whom might betray her to her family. She had proposed that some of

her Red Rock friends should occupy the vacant seats in her box, and Winfred had reserved the adjoining one for the rest of the party, — Mrs. Dinsmore and Miss Grey, Cousin Tom, who had been Vida's true friend in need, Peggy, and little Willie Dinsmore.

The Radcliffe family had been back in town two days. Cousin Tom had joyfully entered into the conspiracy to help Vida attend the long-talked-of first night. She had told him of the meeting between Winfred and her father, and he had deliberately joined issue with her against parental authority. His darling's life should not be wrecked, nor Winfred's either, if it lay in his power to prevent it. They were made for each other, of that he was convinced ; and a whole tribe of unreasonable fathers should not frustrate the evident design of Providence while Tom Ives was on hand to help carry it out.

Vida had not seen Winfred since her return. Sitting there in her box, outwardly calm and unperturbed as a well-brought-up young lady should be, inwardly she was in a state of nervous anticipation and pleasing reminiscence. In this same theatre, beside Winfred, then a fascinating mystery to her, she had seen his other play. The scene of the fire, his care of her, the walk home, all came vividly back to her recollection. The orchestra was playing the last bars of the overture ; there was a stir throughout the audience ; the bell rang once, then a second time, and slowly the curtain went up upon an exquisite picture of a lawn sloping down to a lake, with the portico and veranda of a villa at the left. The door of the box opened, and Winfred stepped in. They all turned and greeted him. His glance sought Vida's, but he did not say much to her. When a man would like to talk volumes of hyperbolic blank verse to a woman, and the situation only permits of commonplace trivialities, he sometimes solves the problem by saying nothing. He stooped and took his mother's hand, and pressed it gently. Vida's cheeks glowed, and her heart gave quick little throbs. It was nearly eight weeks since she had seen him. How grand he looked — so proudly sure of himself and his success ! He was

in evening dress of immaculate perfection. He was calm, self-possessed, apparently as unmoved as though the play were anybody's save his own; but in his eyes could be seen a fire of exultation. They looked unusually dark, and remained fixed steadily upon the stage after Mira Lawrence, the one actress to whom he would intrust his heroine, entered at the right through a clump of trees. He could not see the whole stage from where he stood, so in a few minutes went out and joined the manager in the back part of the auditorium.

One thing was soon very clear, — he possessed pre-eminently the faculty of arousing the immediate interest of an audience. There was no long preamble, there were only a few sentences to get the attention and quiet the usual flutter of programmes and last words of conversation among the spectators, then the action began definitely from the start. The key-note was struck at once, not strongly yet, but delicately and clearly. His work had the advantage of splendid interpretation. The actors had been carefully selected and thoroughly rehearsed, and into every member of the caste he had succeeded in infusing the true spirit of his or her assigned character. In the very first act, the magnitude of this man's genius was so conspicuously apparent that the knowing marvelled, and the ignorant were conscious of a power they could not define. The play was more than a fitting successor to his first. Its strength and brilliancy were unwaveringly sustained throughout. His psychological understanding of humanity, his ability to combine the subtle drawing of character with dramatic feeling and theatrical effect, were extraordinary. And there was no violating of probability, no approach to clap-trap of any kind, and no intricacy of method. It was all perfectly simple, echoing true from the heart. There was not an unnecessary scene, nor a superfluous word. The wit was brilliant, flashing out like a steel blade; the humor spontaneous, inevitable; and with it all the deep current of modern tragedy swept on to its climax steadily, logically, appallingly, but not without a God back of it. It was realism, but idealized realism with a palpitating soul at the centre. It was a sermon

on the iron law of cause and effect ; and, being a sermon, in the old view of things, it was a violation of stage proprieties, an interloper that had no place upon the boards of a theatre. But because it was a play before it was a sermon, its right to be there was proved by the spell under which it held the crowded house, drew the tears of pity, and excited the fever of suspense. "Winfred Grey was the creator of a new and striking school of drama !" — "America had given to the world a leader who would make our stage supreme." So they all agreed in thunders of applause while, with ears deafened by the cheers and clapping, he stood aside unseen, touching the highest pinnacle of success it can fall to the lot of man to reach. From that night his incredulous father looked upon him with wondering pride. His mother drew back from view of the excited house, and silently wept tears she could not check or hide, — the holiest tribute he received that night. Miss Grey's cheeks were flushed and eyes aflame. Peggy was very pale, paler than usual even, and her great eyes seemed expanded to double their ordinary size as she looked triumphantly about the auditorium and uttered to herself exclamations of mad delight. Cousin Tom could not sit still, but got up and down from his seat every five minutes. Vida sat speechless, almost overcome by the intensity of her feelings. He was a god to her ; the applause seemed like the homage of an Olympian hierarchy. In the parquet the seedy man with the nervous manner became excited to such a degree that it was all his companion could do to restrain him. He talked and gesticulated so wildly that the people near by thought he must be drunk or insane, and scowled angrily at him. Finally an usher had to request him to keep still or go out.

At the close of the first act Winfred appeared in the boxes for a moment. Vida was only able to say a few words to him. After the second act she could contain herself no longer, so, under pretence of restlessness, got up and went back near the door of the box. He came in just before the curtain rose again. When he saw her, a sudden impulse seized him. He bent down to her. "I want you to see this act with me," he

said, "I can't stay here, I can't get a full view. Will you come with me up to the balcony? It would be too conspicuous for you downstairs for we'll have to stand. Will you mind?"

"No, no; I'd like to go."

She was trembling with the emotions stirring in her heart. Alone, side by side with the man she loved, the only man she ever had loved, ever could love, listening with him to the lines, watching with him the scenes created by his thought, and imbued with life, with immortality, by the omnipotence of his genius! Side by side with him, thrilling with his success, intoxicated by his triumph! It was an ecstasy beyond which mortal experience cannot pass.

"Wait till the curtain's up so that you won't be stared at. Mother," he stooped and whispered to Mrs. Grey, "I'm going to take Miss Radcliffe with me; she wants to see this act from the balcony."

The curtain rose, the attention of the audience again became fixed upon the stage. He led her up the stairway to the balcony, and took a position from which they commanded the whole scene. There were a number of people standing who had failed to get seats. In the third act came the climax of the play. It moved quickly, in pulsating emotion, pathos and passion blending together, consistently, convincingly true. Winfred's arm touched Vida's, her skirts brushed against him. They breathed and felt and thought as one conscious entity. When the act was over the audience, stilled for a moment by the power of the scene and the perfection of the acting, broke into a tempest of applause. In foreign countries it happens so not infrequently; in America such complete abandon of enthusiasm is rare. Vida swayed as if faint, and steadied herself against a post beside her. Mira Lawrence and Arthur Trenton, the leading man, were called out four times, and still the clamor continued, and cries of "Author! Author!" rang from parquetry to gallery.

"Oh, Winfred!" said Vida, in a whisper. She had no voice to speak aloud.

"Vida, tell me, are *you* satisfied!"

"You are more than human! No other man in all the world could do what you have done."

People were all about them, close beside them, the call for him was growing louder, more impatient. He would have laid all his glory at her feet in this, the moment of its fullest realization, if they had given him time and chance to speak. He hurried down the staircase with her, meeting on the way one of the ushers sent to look for him. They went back along the side aisle. He stopped in the narrow passage behind the boxes. They were cut off entirely from sight of the house, gone mad now at his delay in appearing. Vida had a bunch of pink roses in her dress.

"Give me one," he said.

She unfastened one and held it out to him. He took rose and hand together in his clasp, looked down into her upturned eyes, saw her lips parted by her quick breathing. He threw his arms about her, drew her to him till he felt her heart beating against him, and pressed his mouth to hers in one quick, passionate kiss. He opened the door of her box. With burning cheeks and eyes she went in mechanically; then, with the rose in his hand, he hurried through the entrance at the end of the passage onto the stage. He held the rose when he stepped through the proscenium door into view of the tumultuous house. It was a pretty circumstance, which gave rise to many pretty and romantic stories, none of which, however, excelled the true one. Again and again they cheered him; men pounded the floor with their feet, women waved their handkerchiefs. He stood erect, nothing assertive about him, but superbly self-possessed. His attitude of conscious, unaggressive power, his absolute repose of manner had in them a magnetism that touched every man and woman present as with an electric current. He looked at his friends in the boxes. Vida was in the rear, but stood where he could see her distinctly. Their eyes met for a second. He bowed to the audience, and the tumult went on. He bowed again, and smiled a little. All the women in the house raved about his smile for

the rest of the season. "How grand, how handsome he is!" they exclaimed, waving their handkerchiefs more wildly than ever. He bowed once more, and went off. There was an instant's lull, then they broke out again, and he heard them calling, "Speech, speech, speech!" If he had failed, it would have been very bitter to him, nevertheless he felt there was an element of the absurd in the extravagant homage paid his success. They had made noise enough, why did n't they stop now? A speech! It was ridiculous. It was no occasion for a speech. What could he make one about? But evidently they were determined to have it. The manager and the whole caste urged him on, so he unwillingly stepped again before the curtain. As soon as they understood that he would respond to their persistence, the uproar ceased, and the house grew expectantly still.

"Ladies and gentlemen —"

In the parquet a man sprang from his seat, — the shabby, keen-eyed man who had been suppressed. He passionately threw off the detaining hand of his companion.

"I've something to say before he speaks," he cried wildly. "My name's Richard Paton. Five months ago I took him the manuscript of a play I've written. He's stolen my play, act for act, scene for scene, character for character. He's stolen my play! It is n't his you've seen, it is n't his you've applauded, it's mine, mine; every word of it, from beginning to end, is mine; and I call upon you to drag him off that stage and do me justice, public justice, here and now. I'll fight this to the end; I'll have an injunction out to-morrow. I can prove his theft in any court in the land. Will you help me; will you —"

He was in the middle of a row or he would have been stopped sooner. At first the audience was simply startled by his outburst; then, as he ranted on, they thought he was a lunatic, and watched the ushers and policemen hurrying down to put him out. In the boxes where Winfred's party sat there was a moment's angry consternation. His father and mother understood nothing of what it all meant, except that Winfred was being attacked. They had never heard of the much-practised sin

called plagiarism. Old Mr. Grey, with rising ire, asked Clyde of what the man was daring to accuse Winfred. Clyde explained, and in a second the old man was on his feet, his face white, his limbs quivering with rage. Before they knew what he was about he stepped to the front of the box.

"That man is a liar," he cried, in a voice that trembled with wrath and yet rang clear and loud. "There is my son," he pointed to Winfred; "here am I. Do we look like men who steal? You've all gone mad over what he's done to-night. If he was a prophet from heaven, you could n't make a greater time. Are you going to let a miserable coward blacken his name right before you?"

They tried to draw him back. All eyes were now fixed upon him alone, — the object of much surprise and some amusement. He stood facing them, a majestic, Jove-like figure in his righteous wrath. Winfred was pale, but stood immovable. In what more awful position could a human being find himself? The maniac in the parquet was nothing. But his father! And the papers would trumpet it from ocean to ocean, beyond the ocean, wherever his name had reached and been honored. It was crushing.

"You've applauded him till his old mother and father feel prouder than any queen and king on earth. Applaud him now in the face of this cowardly lie."

It was a sensation, it was in many respects a diverting one, but in spite of it the old man had won them. They smiled at him good-naturedly, and responded to his appeal with ardor. He looked at Winfred, his face aglow.

"They believe in you, they believe in you, my boy," he said, gleefully, and then sat down with the serene consciousness of having done well. The shabby man was ejected, raging and threatening. Winfred stepped close to the footlights. He still held Vida's rose. There was no visible sign of the mortification which he felt. He spoke without effort in distinct, full tones. His voice had the round, rich quality which carries, and he could be easily heard throughout the house.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I regret inexpressibly the disturbance

which has occurred. Though entirely beyond my control, as the innocent cause of it, I apologize for the annoyance to which you have been subjected." Then he thanked them briefly on behalf of the management, the actors, and himself for their reception of his play, and added a few words concerning his theory of dramatic writing, and his belief in the idealistic principle of art. That was all.

It had seemed as though the disturbance which had taken place must be fatal to the rest of the play ; but by his power of leadership and charm of personality he got control of them at once, recalled their distracted attention, and quieted the flutter of excitement. He retired, followed by fresh applause spontaneously and heartily awarded. The spell of his genius reasserted itself, and the last act was played amidst breathless silence. The ending was as impressively unconventional as the rest. There was no tableau, no rounding off of each destiny. The curtain went down upon Mira Lawrence, silent, alone upon the stage, seated at a table, her head leaning on her hand. It was sad, but in the sadness lurked the suggestion of something beyond, something still to live for, to struggle for, and to achieve. The sorrow was overshadowed by the feeling that circumstances, however cruel, are not omnipotent, and cannot defeat the purposes of a future which holds among its unknown gifts the recompense due worthy and unselfish deeds.

CHAPTER XIX.

IT was fortunate that Vida did not get down till late the next morning.

The rest of the family were assembled around the breakfast table. They were all in rather a good humor. Departure from Red Rock and what they called return to civilization were conducive to amiability. Radcliffe himself was particularly genial, as he had good cause to be. He had beaten the strike in his silk factory the week before, and it had reopened on his own terms. Except on these terms it would have remained closed all winter. Notwithstanding some heavy financial losses which he had sustained, he could afford, without serious inconvenience, to let the hands obstinately starve themselves to death if they chose. They thought they could stand it too, though with less convenience; but when it became a matter of fact instead of theory they yielded sullenly. The cry of the inner, unfed man is very peremptory. A committee was delegated to try and effect a compromise with Radcliffe, and, failing this, accede to the inevitable. He treated them with the autocratic spirit manifested when suppressing cases of insubordination in his home circle. They were inferior animals whose audacity in presuming to dictate terms to him he proceeded to set plainly before them. Though Radcliffe failed entirely to realize the temper of the times upon which the world had fallen, he was, nevertheless, a shrewd man, else he never could have amassed his millions. His weakness lay in a tendency to look upon himself as the pivot of the universe, and in a correlative taste for asserting his private judgment and will on all occasions and in spite of all persuasion to the contrary. It was the tendency which led him into whatever mistakes he made. He made a

mistake when blinding himself to the ugly spirit he was further fostering, instead of conciliating among his factory hands. But no suspicion of the fact came to disturb him as he sat at the foot of his table in the bosom of his family.

"Well," he said, rubbing his hands together after the manner of middle-aged gentlemen confronted with an excellent breakfast and with no hungry strikers to bother them, "well, it's good to have you home again. A man wants his family about him. I dare say Red Rock was rather a severe ordeal, but it's done you all good. Georgiana, you look ten years younger."

She had looked twenty years older while fretting and fuming in the salubrious atmosphere of Red Rock, so it might have been inferred that escape therefrom was the true reason of her retrogression towards youth.

"And the children — they've some color in their cheeks now."

"Confound the cook, the oatmeal's full of lumps. Why can't you get somebody who knows her business?"

It was Julian who spoke, but every one was so accustomed to his outbursts that they even passed without reprimand from his father.

"I suppose Vida got home late, as she is n't down this morning," said Radcliffe, with paternal interest.

"I don't see why Cousin Tom did n't ask me too," said Mabel.

"You're not so silly you don't understand you're nowhere with Cousin Tom alongside of Vida," commented Julian. "In the first place, you're not so good-looking. You're not bad, but Vida's stunning. Any man'll take a stunning girl out twenty times, where he takes an average one once."

Fraternal candor may have its merits, but they do not appear on the surface.

"I did n't ask your opinion of my looks," said Mabel, with excusable sharpness.

"You need n't get mad about it; I did n't mean to offend

you. Beauty's only skin deep anyway, you know. Perhaps it is n't much consolation, as the skin's the only thing anybody sees except doctors and such human excavators. Say, Governor, don't you suppose it must have been a doctor who first made that remark after he'd been turning some one inside out?"

"Julian," said Miss Radcliffe, "we are at breakfast."

"Are we? I thought we must have been sitting here till the next meal had come round, so's to cool things off. The coffee's beastly cold; everything's beastly cold."

"Tisn't, my coffee's just burned me down to my stomach."

Perhaps Julian's general allusion to the inner structure of the human animal made Clara feel at liberty to refer specifically to its parts.

"Clara, that's a very inelegant way to speak," corrected Miss Radcliffe again.

"Is it inelegant to have a stomach?"

"Come, come, that'll do; eat your breakfast," said Radcliffe.

"How can I eat it? Somebody'll tell me it's inelegant to put it where it belongs."

"That will do, Miss."

When Radcliffe took this tone, Clara knew it was the part of wisdom to subside.

Having substantially finished his breakfast, Radcliffe asked for his paper, while lingering over a second cup of coffee. Of course he looked first at the stock quotations. They were sufficiently satisfactory. Next he casually glanced at the record of the "Senate's latest imbecilities." Suddenly his fingers tightened on the paper, and his eyes glared at some headlines of a page he had just turned. The family knew at once that something was wrong.

BRILLIANT PLAY AT THE COSMOPOLITAN.

WINFRED GRAY'S MAGNIFICENT SUCCESS.

*Great Artistic and Social Event. — The Evening's
Sensational Disturbance.*

He read the laudatory criticism to the end. It made him burn with rage. He came to the description of the sensational episode. A swift, venomous thought went through his mind.

"What's the matter, papa?" asked Mabel.

He paid no attention to her.

"Governor, what's the matter?" asked Julian.

"This scoundrel, this Winfred Grey, 's got his deserts at last, at least he's going to get them."

"What do you mean, Papa? Are you talking about the writer, the man who was at Red Rock this summer?" asked Mabel.

"Yes, confound him! He's the biggest rascal on top of the earth; and here he is exposed publicly, though the fools try to defend him. This play of his last night was claimed by another man in the very middle of the performance, and then his Hoosier father made a scene, and the man was dragged out. But he'll have justice, if there's justice to be had in the country."

He suddenly raised his head, and with knitted brow looked from one to the other of his household. "Was Vida there last night?"

"I don't know," said Mabel, "she did n't tell me where she was going."

"I forbid every one of you to go near his abominable play. It's a most demoralizing, outrageous production. Did any of you know this man at Red Rock?"

"I met him once or twice, that's all," said Mabel. "He's like all those literary people, a horrible bore to everybody else."

"That's just because *you* bored him, probably," said Julian, the fraternal candor again coming to the front. "Vida seemed to find him interesting enough."

"Did Vida see much of this scoundrel?" Radcliffe's expression was getting very black indeed. "Mabel, you ought to know something about it. Answer me."

"As I was away most of the summer, I don't see how I can. He never called at the house, so she can't have known him very well," she added. Among the offspring of even the most in-

harmonious households, save in cases of personal resentment, there always exists an instinct of mutual protection against the common danger of parental wrath. Mabel acted promptly upon the unformulated but well established principle.

"And he lived five or six miles away," said Julian, knowing, however, that it was only three.

"I've seen her on the rocks with him," said Clara. Natural malignity and unripe years exempted her from full alliance with the defensive league.

"If she happened to meet him on the rocks or anywhere else, she could n't help speaking to him," said Julian. "And you can say what you please, he's a splendid-looking chap. If I were a girl I'd take every chance to speak to him I could get, especially as he's the rage just now."

"Don't talk so vulgarly before your sisters." Radcliffe folded his paper and rose. Contrary to his usual custom he left the house at once.

"What the devil do you suppose the Governor's so rampant against Grey for? I did n't know he knew him, did you?" asked Julian.

"Oh, it's one of his notions," said Mabel, disrespectfully.

On his way down town Radcliffe sat with compressed lips, holding his paper high in front of him, so that no one should see or speak to him, but he was not reading. He did not get out of the elevated train at his usual station, but went on further. He walked across Broadway, then down several blocks. Finding the building he was looking for, he entered and hastily made his way to an office in the rear. The office was peculiar from the numerous directories with which it was furnished, — directories of all parts of the country, all parts of the civilized globe. He asked for Superintendent Wiley, and was shown at once to an inner room, where he found that most important character of modern evolution. The atmosphere of Superintendent Wiley's sanctum was mystery. It was Superintendent Wiley's vocation to deal in mystery and with mystery. It was his bread and butter, and his source of fame. Every one on entering his

presence became perforce mysterious, though the Superintendent himself handled his chief commodity in a practical, business-like manner, just as if it were silk or cotton goods, tea or sugar, or any other ordinary merchandize. In a word, Radcliffe had sought the largest and best private detective agency in the city, his business being the prompt discovery of the bellicose Richard Paton's whereabouts.

"Find him to-day," he said. "It'll be an easy matter. I wish him to call upon me this afternoon. I'll be in Hoboken at the factory after four o'clock. I prefer to see him there. Don't spare any expense to find him."

Radcliffe was not so clear-headed as usual that day. He came near making one or two serious errors in a large contract he was negotiating, and was only saved by the hesitating, but timely warning of his head clerk. Nothing disturbs the balance of the mind quite so much as a well-developed gangrene of revenge. Its gnawing corrosion precludes the possibility of adequate attention to any other matter.

At three o'clock Radcliffe started for the factory. He had only been there once since its reopening. On the corner of the block where it stood he passed four or five men whom he did not notice. But they paid marked attention to him, looking after him with angry scowls and muttered curses. One of them, familiarly known as Nat, had been spokesman of the committee which was treated to some of the Radcliffe disdain. He was a combative individual, with nearly as exaggerated a sense of his own importance as Radcliffe himself. In short, he was one of those intelligent, belligerent, and naturally brutal personages with a gift of rough eloquence,—the kind of man who is always the leader of any uprising during its aggressive stage. When it goes to pieces, he refuses to surrender, and retains about him a similarly-minded following made up of the lawless or desperate element of the lost cause. Nat's wife, a frail, consumptive woman whom he loved in his brute way, had died during the strike. While he was chafing under compulsory idleness, she had tried to take his place as the bread-winner. There

being five children to provide for besides herself and him, she not only failed to do it, but wore herself out in the effort, and quietly lay down and died. A puny child of two then died likewise, and next another puny one of four. The strike ended a few days later; but the dumbly suffering husband and father had become a bloodthirsty seeker of what he considered retributive justice. He could have gone back to work with the other men, but fiercely swore that he and the remaining children should be buried beside their dead first. In the mean time he'd wait his chance. Precisely what he meant by waiting his chance was confided to a handful of almost equally fierce adherents. Waiting their chance became their chief occupation. They were engaged upon it when Radcliffe passed them at the corner of his factory.

As Radcliffe went through the building he looked in at one or two of the workrooms, but took no notice of the moody glances cast upon him. At precisely four o'clock Richard Paton was announced as a "man who wanted to see him."

"Show him in," said Radcliffe.

He entered Radcliffe's private office, shabby, nervous as always, and much puzzled to imagine what the financial magnate, Gordon Radcliffe, could possibly desire with him, the aspiring and yet unheard-of literary genius still shrouded in his own obscurity.

"Sit down," said Radcliffe.

He sat down. Had this merchant prince by any wild chance learned of his two or three late successful flights in verse? They had embellished the columns of a Sunday edition of one of the daily papers; perhaps the millionaire had *read* them and — But fancy's dreams here became too resplendent to dally with.

"You naturally wonder what I want of you," said Radcliffe. "You'll understand in a few minutes, if you'll first answer my questions."

Paton, being sensitive, as unrecognized talent generally is, did not like the authoritative manner of his possible patron, but obscurity must pocket and swallow what it dares not resent.

"Upon what grounds does the charge of the plagiarism of your play rest?"

Paton sprang to his feet, everything forgotten at mention of his burning grievance. "On what grounds! On the grounds of my own manuscript. Here it is, here it is in my pocket now! There, there, you can look at it; you can see for yourself! The plot is identical from beginning to end, he's only introduced a few different details. The division of the acts is the same, the characters are the same, even some bits of the dialogue the same. There, you can see for yourself."

Radcliffe pushed away the outstretched hand containing the manuscript.

"I have n't seen the other man's play. But — I — believe — he — has — robbed — you." He spoke very deliberately. Paton could have fallen upon his knees in gratitude. This was the first person who had not treated him and his accusation with contumely.

"How did he come to know your play?"

"I left it with him to read; I wanted his opinion of it. I left it last May. He had it four months, then I took it away because I was told he had n't time to read it. And — and he stole it from me almost word for word."

"He's supposed to be a reputable individual, and besides he has a name and you have n't."

"That's it, that's the awful injustice of it. Nobody'll listen to me, and I've no money to invoke the law." He was still standing, talking and gesticulating excitedly. "It's a disgrace to the country that I can't get justice because I'm poor. I must see myself robbed of the thought and work of my brain! It's a disgrace to civilization."

"If you had money, you think you could get an injunction against his play?"

"Yes, to-morrow if I had money, to-morrow."

"If you agree to tell no one who backs you, absolutely no one, unless I give you permission, you can have all the money necessary to fight him for the next ten years. Why I make the offer naturally does not concern you."

Radcliffe, of course, understood the probability of the man's

being a mere crank deceived by belief in his own merits, and perhaps by some unimportant resemblance between his supposedly trashy production and Winfred Grey's play. If this were so, it would be apparent on the first investigation ; if not, if there were a real foundation for his accusations, Radcliffe would have found the opportunity of revenge for which he was looking. When Paton understood Radcliffe's proposition, he was stunned with amazed delight. After recovering his senses, they talked it over carefully for an hour or more, and Radcliffe began to feel some confidence in the man's case. For one thing, when he calmed down and spoke rationally, he showed himself to be possessed of education and intelligence. The interview ended with much satisfaction to both parties. Radcliffe dismissed his guest with sufficient money in cash for immediate expenses, directing him to call early the next morning upon certain prominent lawyers, and begin proceedings at once. Then he looked at his watch. It was half-past five. He locked his desk, gave some orders to the superintendent, drew on his gloves, put on his silk hat, and went out, a prosperous, important-looking man of aristocratic appearance. At the corner of the street he suddenly received a blow over the eye and another on the back of the head. As he fell heavily to the pavement a shower of blows and kicks rained down upon him, a view of dirty, brutal faces danced before him a moment, and then he knew nothing more. He would have been killed but for the interference of people attracted by the noise. The police arrived a moment later, and captured three of his assailants, who, it may be well to relate incidentally, were consigned to the safe-keeping of Sing Sing for the next twenty years.

Radcliffe had conquered the strike, and had fired the bomb with which to explode Winfred's reputation ; but he had done it at very great personal cost. When a man nearly sixty years of age is beaten within an inch of his life, he is apt to carry acute physical memories of it to the end of his days.

CHAPTER XX.

OLD Mr. Grey's explosion at the theatre had been a very trying experience to Vida. It had filled her with the horror which a refined woman always feels when the people she is with make themselves undesirably conspicuous. And that it should happen at the supreme moment of Winfred's triumph was dreadful. It was almost wicked. Winfred himself, after the first shock, brought his philosophy to bear upon the episode. He even saw its humorous side. And what did it matter, any way? The old gentleman had excited as much good feeling as amusement. Still cold shivers ran through him when he thought how unpleasant the affair must have been to Vida. And it had spoiled the whole evening. He had ordered supper at Delmonico's for the party, but after what had occurred it was impossible for Vida to go. The reporting fraternity would be as thick as flies wherever he went, letting nothing of this miserable evening escape, and chronicling its every detail. Vida must not take any chance of being brought into the story. As soon as possible after leaving the stage, he went to the door of the second box and beckoned to Cousin Tom.

"She must leave the theatre immediately after the last curtain goes down," said Winfred. "I'll come and take her and you out by the stage door, so that she can get away without being seen. It's outrageous to be obliged to do it. Some day —" The speech was left unfinished save for the hot flash of his eyes.

He did not go into Vida's box. He could not; his philosophy had not yet gained sufficient momentum. Vida realized the necessity for falling in with the arrangement that had been made. It was a disappointing termination to what had promised to be the gladdest day of all her girlhood. Her Red Rock friends

knew enough of her situation at home to understand her abrupt departure. Winfred came for her while the final burst of applause was shaking the house after it had recovered from the spell wrought by the last act's pathos. As she followed him for the second time through the little door leading to the side of the stage, through the wings, and down the narrow passage to the street, she thought how much had happened since that other night when she followed him the same way, faint and bewildered by the terror of the scene she had witnessed. There were the actors crowding about the stage, not frightened and confused as then, but talking, laughing, congratulating each other, loud with praises of Winfred and his play. Some of them looked after her and Cousin Tom as they passed, Cousin Tom, true to his unwavering object, walking ahead. Winfred did not speak, and she could not. His kiss was still warm upon her lips. It made her mute and self-conscious. There was the usual gathering of men at the entrance. Winfred stopped before reaching them. Cousin Tom bustled out of the door.

"That wretched scene!" said Winfred. "Father's a grand old man, but he had a most unfortunate inspiration."

"Don't think of it; forget it, and think only of the rest, of the splendid success you've won."

The porter at the door turned and saw them.

"When can I see you? Where can I see you?" asked Winfred, hurriedly.

"I—I can't tell now, I—"

He was holding her hand. "Don't keep me waiting long, Vida,—don't, if you have any mercy."

"I—I told Mrs. Dinsmore I'd call the day after to-morrow."

The porter turned away again, and his back was towards them.

"Look at me, Vida."

She raised her eyes; but they dropped under the fire that glowed in his. Some of the men had recognized, and were glancing at him, or rather at Vida.

"Good-night, little girl. God bless you."

"Good-night."

Then he went on and opened the door for her which Cousin Tom had half closed behind him. That was the way it had ended. Cousin Tom wondered if the look on her face meant what he had schemed for so unscrupulously.

Vida did not appear at breakfast the next morning because she had a premonition of what was going to occur, knowing the effect the morning's paper would have upon her father. It was prudent to remain inaccessible to questioning. She made Miles get her a cup of coffee and a roll, and then went into the pretty little boudoir assigned to herself and Mabel. There she sat down to think, as she had been thinking most of the night.

How long the touch of that lover's first kiss lingers on a woman's trembling lips! She thrills again and again with memory of its pressure; she feels the close embrace of the arms that have held her. The first kiss seals all her maiden dreams and hopes, all her woman's capacity for love and self-surrender to the one man to whom she is henceforth consecrated. She is his and his only, from every throbbing pulse of her body to every heaven-born attribute of her soul. Even her very garments are sacred; she shrinks a little if they so much as brush against any other man.

Vida's dreams were very beautiful. Love that sees a noble nature through weaknesses and sins which hide it from all the rest of the world; love exalted by its aspirations for the cherished soul whose salvation it tirelessly labors, prays, suffers to achieve; love, the Saviour, the Redeemer,—knows depths of agony which some day, if endurance fail not, will win heights of joy more sublime perhaps than are reached through any other human experience. The love whose dear one is already strong to meet, to battle with and conquer the temptations of life needs not to weep, but in missing the suffering it also misses the selfless rapture of the first. But it, too, has its own peculiarly exquisite joy—the infinite sweetness of looking up, and of honoring one already grand and worthy in the sight of

all men. This was given to Vida. Winfred's character, his brilliant powers of intellect, his life, — there was nothing she need excuse, everything she could be proud of. She felt her whole nature throb and dilate with passionate desire to be a woman fit for such a man. She would aspire to and strive for it in every thought and act. She felt exalted to think that he had chosen her out of all the world. And yet she was conscious of an ability to stand side by side with him, to be neither a burden for him to carry nor a child for him to look tenderly down upon, but a companion, a wife in every true sense of the word.

Vida's individuality would never be lost even in such a dominating one as Winfred's. If their love was founded in the truth of spiritual affinity the two would be welded together in one of those rare ideal unions which the word *marriage* implies. If not, there would be the friction, the anguish, the wrench, and then the end. But of all this Vida, of course, had no thought. She only painted golden pictures of the wondrous life before them, its raptures, its labors, its hopes, its grand victories. Together — that was the one word of magic that had unlocked heaven to her unchecked imagination. The next day she would meet him at Mrs. Dinsmore's. He would then find or make some opportunity to say what he had waited to say — she understood now, it had flashed upon her in a second — till he could come to her with all his new and greatest honors in his hands. What would her father do? There was nothing to expect from him but relentless, despotic opposition. If she married Winfred *she would have to run away with him*. She, Vida Radcliffe, one of the chief figures in a run-away match! She remembered, as one does occasional unimportant things, what Mabel had said to her the afternoon of their quarrel in the Park: "Some day you'll rush off and do something outrageous." She laughed out loud, a bright, joyous laugh. The justification of Mabel's prophecy might soon be realized. Then life would really begin, life with Winfred, life in Paradise, all harmony and peace, all righteousness and love. The sweetness

of the thought made her eyes shine with a soft, beautiful light, and brought a smile of unclouded bliss to her delicately curved lips. Her dark hair and the warm color in her cheeks contrasted effectively with her pale-green morning gown. She was very lovely to look upon. All the old coldness of expression had vanished from her face, the old indifference from her manner. She had gained infinitely in womanliness, at the cost, it is true, of much of that distinctive air of conscious superiority which had been the envy of many who emulated but could not acquire it. She reflected with a delightful sense of relief that she would be free forever from certain unpleasant features of the life she had led that summer, and which had troubled her a great deal at times in spite of all the outweighing happiness. She had begun to feel keenly the ignominy of a self-assertion practised only in secret because she had not courage to declare it openly. She was tired of stealing off as she had done to attend Winfred's first night, was tired of parrying questions, and making excuses. It violated the frank, truthful bent of her nature, it made her feel ashamed of herself, and unworthy of Winfred, though it was he who had first led her into the devious ways. But he had looked upon it as a choice of evils and had told her that some time she would have to meet her father on his own ground, demand a reasonable freedom, and let him understand she meant to have it. It is a difficult, well nigh an impossible, thing to do when one is a woman carefully deprived of any education fitting her to earn a living and depending for every necessity of her material existence upon the person she is going to defy. Vida was feeling very comfortable in the thought that now there would be one grand defiance, and all would be over.

The door opened, she looked up and Mabel entered the room.

"You're here, are you?" said Mabel. She threw herself into a chair, and glanced at Vida curiously. "Vida, were you at Winfred Grey's play last night?"

Vida flushed a little. "Yes, I was."

"I thought so. It was lucky you were not downstairs this morning."

"Why?"

"Did you know he's one of papa's antagonisms?"

"Yes."

"You *did*! Then that's why you went off without saying anything. You were very sagacious."

"Mabel," Vida straightened up impetuously in her chair, "have you ever thought that it's all wrong, that papa has no right to treat us as if we have no minds or wants of our own?"

"I have n't exactly thought of *that*. Most fathers are just like him I suppose. I admit he's disgustingly aggravating sometimes, but one can manage with a little discretion."

"Yes, manage by deceiving and prevaricating. I've been doing it all summer; I even *lied* to him, deliberately lied to him once. I've simply loathed myself ever since."

Mabel shrugged her shoulders. "I've lied to him frequently, and I don't loathe myself in the least. It's his fault, not mine. What was your lie about, — anything particular?"

"I can't tell you."

Mabel leaned forward and looked closely at her. "It was about Winfred Grey."

Vida did not answer.

"Good gracious, you — " She did not finish the sentence, but continued gazing at her a moment, then leaned back in her chair. "I came to tell you something special," she said, "a most important and exciting piece of news. When papa has answered a much scented and coroneted letter which arrived last evening, I shall be the happy *fiancée* of the very illustrious *Comte de Choiseul*. Bar Harbor and Aunt Elizabeth did it."

"Mabel!"

"My dear, I did n't say Mephistopheles or Beelzebub."

"Mabel, it is n't true!"

"I don't think it's a very polite or sisterly way to receive the announcement. The Comte de Choiseul is n't deformed or imbecile."

"He's fifty years old, and even women know he's a *roué*."

Mabel knit her brow impatiently. "And he's a noble of the old *régime*, with one of the finest estates in France, though I admit it's falling into decrepitude."

"You can't *love* this man!"

"I like him very much indeed. He amuses me immensely, and I amuse him. The first necessity of matrimonial success is never to bore each other."

"To marry a man you don't love! Oh!" Vida shuddered. "And the life he's led! To let that man touch you! To be his *wife*!"

"You've known plenty of men just like him yourself; they've called on you; you've danced with them and accepted their attentions. I don't see that you've any special reason to talk so to me."

"I've done a great many things I'm ashamed to remember; but I did n't know any better, I did n't understand. How dare such men come near decent women, come near young girls, with all their low vices tainting the very air they breathe? They would n't dare if you and I and others like us were different, if we did n't smile at them and receive them and *marry* them. Does papa say nothing? Is he going to let you do it?"

"If it were so terrible, do you suppose he would let me? He's very much pleased."

"Then father or no father it's abominable in him."

"One would really imagine you know a great deal more than papa."

"It's because he knows much more than I that it's abominable."

"I suppose your hero, your Winfred Grey, is a saint."

"If I'd only known him before, I'd never have degraded myself by tolerating some of the creatures we meet, who actually come here to the house."

"You must have acquired a choice kind of knowledge this summer. I confess I'd rather remain in respectable ignorance. I am not able to tell your saints from the sinners. If

there's any mysterious way of discovering, I'd be ashamed to know it."

"You ought to be able to tell; every woman ought to, and every woman can. There's nothing mysterious about it; it shows in their faces, in their tastes, in everything about them, if we choose to notice; we can *feel* it, but we don't pay any attention, because we don't care. It's an awful thing, but it's true. Perhaps it is n't our fault; nobody teaches us better, nobody makes us understand. If you cared, nothing in all this world could force you to marry that man."

"I — I don't think it's at all nice or kind in you to say such things, to make me feel so horribly, when you ought to want me to be happy. It is n't my business to reform the world."

"Yes, it is your business and my business and everybody's business. It's only for his title that you'll marry this man, nothing else in the world. And he's marrying you because he wants papa to put a new roof on his dilapidated old castle."

"Oh!" Mabel clinched her hands and made an angry movement. "Very well then, I'm utterly depraved and bad; but do you think you've been behaving so well that you've any right to criticise me? You've been running all over the country all summer with that Winfred Grey. I never did such a thing since I was born. I suppose you consider that right and proper."

"I certainly don't consider it improper to enjoy the companionship of a man like Mr. Grey whenever I can."

"Perhaps the rest of the world may not agree with you. I suppose you've done what I have n't had virtue to do, you've fallen in love, and with this saint of the theatre."

"I love him as I never knew I could love any one on earth."

"Vida Radcliffe!" It was Mabel's turn now. She sat speechless a moment. "Good heavens, and you talk about the Count de Choiseul! Do you mean to say this is the kind of man *you* would marry?"

"I'd marry him to-day if he came and asked me."

"You must be insane. We know these people, we cultivate them because it's the thing; but we *don't* marry them."

"No, we marry broken down French counts, dissolute English lords, and gambling Wall Street stock speculators."

"We marry gentlemen."

"If these creatures fill your conception of gentlemen, they don't mine."

"I suppose only persons brought up among cows and turnips do that. As to your friend's saintliness, it's a little difficult for ordinary mortals to believe in. Theatrical characters are not generally remarkable for their virtues."

"Mr. Grey happens to be remarkable in more ways than one."

"There's certainly nothing coy about your infatuation, it's charmingly open. I suppose his dreadful family does n't affect his superiority — a father who makes an exhibition of himself every time he appears in public, a mother with barnyard written all over her, and a woman's rights sister! Heavens, what a connection! Are you going to disgrace us, Vida?"

"No, you are going to do that. Whenever that odious count comes here, which I suppose will be frequently, I warn you I will not stay in the room with him; and if he wants to know why, I'll tell him."

"I sha'n't be obliged to leave the room for this Grey man. *He* won't be allowed to enter the house. Am I to understand that you're actually engaged to him?"

"I have n't said so."

"Has he proposed to you?"

"Your questions are a little impertinent."

"He has n't? Well, thank Heaven for that! It's just possible then that he's not so frantically in love with you as you are with him, and we may escape the consequences of your insanity. I hardly imagine you'll go so far as to do the proposing yourself."

There was a sharp rap at the door. "May I come in?" asked a quick staccato voice, and, without waiting for an answer, there dashed into the room a very well-built tailor-made girl, with very bright eyes and a very exuberant laugh. It was Bess Huntington, Vida's whilom friend and chum.

"My dear, I *am* so glad to see you!" She kissed Vida enthusiastically. "Mabel," she kissed Mabel, "I'm so glad to see you! How are you both? When did you get back? I mean you got back Monday, did n't you? U—m, is n't it just lovely to see you!"

"I did n't know you were in town," said Vida, without any enthusiasm at all.

"We came in last week. We had *such* a summer! Was n't it disgusting that you could n't come to us, Vida? Poor mamma, she's all right now; but I *was* so disappointed. And you poor things off in that hopeless place! How did you survive?" She sat down and began pulling off her gloves.

"Mabel, I've heard all kinds of rumors about you. *Are* they true?"

"You'll have to be a little more definite. What do you mean by rumors?"

"*Are* you engaged to the Count de Choiseul? Are you? If it's true, I'll get up and bless you on the spot."

"Yes, it's true, or it will be by this evening. I think he ought to get the letter by then. But you need n't bless me; it is n't an occasion for blessings, it's one for curses and heroics."

"You funny girl, what do you mean? A countess! And I know I'll never be more than plain Mrs., if I'm ever that. Vida, what makes you look so — so I don't know what? You're as solemn as a sister of the black veil. Is n't it lovely to think of Mabel's being a countess; and won't it be yum yum to go and visit her at her mediæval château? Perhaps she'll help us to another count or a marquis or something."

"Vida does n't believe in counts and such inferior creatures any more; she only believes in intellect and cranks," said Mabel. "She's advanced and improved entirely out of sight of us grovellers among ordinary, respectable society."

"What's Mabel talking about, Vida?" asked Bess.

"We don't agree on some points, that's all. Tell me about yourself, Bess."

"I have n't anything to tell, at least I've such lots I don't

know where to begin, and I have n't a minute to stop any way. Mamma let me have the carriage ; and I just drove up to ask you to go with me. I'm off on a shopping raid, and we can talk between times. There's the darlinest coat at Howard and White's you ever saw. Mamma says it's too dear — two hundred and sixty dollars ; but I'm going to have it sent up all the same, and make papa say I can have it. Do go along and get ready, Vida." Bess began pulling on her gloves again.

"Thank you very much, but I can't go."

"Nonsense, you know you have n't an earthly thing to do."

"Bess," said Mabel, "you'd better get used to the awful fact at once — Vida'll never be able to go anywhere any more. She's become a superior person, with ideas and hobbies. We're out of it, my dear ; we're out of it, lost in total, degrading darkness."

Vida's mouth began to get its set look, and her eyes to kindle with their most ominous blaze. "I expect a friend this morning," she said, coldly.

"One of the girls?" asked Bess.

"One of the cranks," said Mabel, *sotto voce*.

"Nobody you know," answered Vida ; "Margaret Wendell, a girl I met this summer."

"Dear me, it's too bad ! I thought we'd have just a lovely day. I *must* tell you something before I go. We've been talking up a theatre club. Belle Devereux, Maud Granville, Pauline Ainsworth, you two girls, and I are to belong, and mamma'll chaperon us. We have n't settled on the men yet. We want some real jolly ones, so we're going to pick them very carefully. We'll only have it once a month — that's often enough ; and we'll have supper at the Waldorf afterwards. And then there's the dancing class. After all that row last season between the matrons, mamma and Mrs. Granville have said we can get up a new one ourselves, and leave those old cats out. And, my dear, we want to have a regular series of private theatricals this winter — for some charity of course. Oh, and I must tell you — Belle's cousin, Mrs. Van Cortlandt, knows

Winfred Grey very well ; and Belle 's going to try and make her get him to help us with the theatricals ; but she 's so disagreeable about doing anything of that kind for one. He 's the sweetest thing you ever saw. You ought to have been at the Cosmopolitan Theatre last night ; there was a perfect scene, and he did look simply divine. And as to his play ! It 's the queerest thing ; but we just went wild over him all the same. Papa says I behaved like a little fool, and I suppose I did. It 's so mean you can't go with me. I want to talk everything over with you while it 's fresh."

" Bess, I might as well tell you now, I 'm not going to belong to any theatre clubs or dancing classes or anything else ; and I 'm not going to buy any clothes, and I 'm not going to do a single one of the stupid, tiresome things I 've nearly killed myself doing for the last five years."

" What in the world do you mean ? "

" Oh, nothing," said Mabel, " we 've got a reformer in the family, that 's all ; just think of it, a real live genuine reformer."

" Yes, I *have* undertaken to reform myself ; and it 's an extremely difficult piece of work. It would n't be a bad idea for Mabel and you, Bess, and all the other girls to try too."

She was standing drawn up to her full height like a young goddess of combat. She was burning with what she believed was entirely righteous indignation, but fully three quarters of which was personal anger. Like all young converts to an inspiring cause, her zeal outstripped her wisdom by many lengths, in fact it finally left wisdom side tracked and dashed on to the finish alone.

" We 're all a lot of useless, selfish cumberers of the earth. We don't do anything but what it suits us to do ; we don't think of anything but our own silly, narrow-minded pleasures. We don't think, we don't care, that the city 's alive with girls who are made bad because you and I have all the money, and they 'll starve if they 're not bad. We go to dinners and lunches and operas, while women and children are struggling to get dry bread to eat ; we spend every penny we get hold of to buy Donovan

dresses, and make ourselves fascinating to a lot of selfish, drinking, gambling men we ought to cross the street to avoid coming near. We amuse ourselves with fairs and amateur theatricals everybody hates, and call it charity. We have spasms of pretending to sew for the poor, and eat up dollars of candy while we 're making a twenty-five-cent apron. You both stand there looking as if I were demented ; but you know every word I say 's true, and you simply don't want to acknowledge it, or you 're so used to thinking only of yourselves it seems as if any one who begins to think of other people has gone mad." The color was bright in her cheeks, her voice vibrated with intensity.

"Why, my dear Vida," said Bess, "I never heard any one go on so in my life. And you look ready to annihilate the whole city. You talk as if we had n't a decent or Christian feeling between us."

"If you have, give up your theatre clubs and your suppers this winter, and come and help me. Give up your two-hundred-and-sixty-dollar coat. I 'm going right in where people are poor and miserable, and want every cent you waste. I sha'n't like it a bit better than you. I *bate* dirt and smells ; but it 's no worse for me than for other women who do it, and men too, and it won't be any worse for you. You 'll do some good then, a great deal more than getting up all the *charitable* private theatricals in the country. And as to Winfred Grey, if you think he 'll have anything to do with them you 'll be very, very much disappointed ; and Mrs. Van Cortlandt is much too sensible a woman to ask him to, or want him to throw away his time if he would. Bess, it 's time you realized that people like us are by no means the charming creatures we think ourselves, and that people who are really something laugh at us and our silly pretensions, and would rather sit and dress dolls and spin tops with children all day than bore themselves talking to us five minutes. When we go among people who have minds and education and know how to *think*, we find out that all our brightness is froth, that we 're the shallowest humbugs walking this globe. Winfred Grey ! Do you really suppose Belle and Maud and

those girls could interest such a man as Winfred Grey half a minute?"

Somebody knocked at the door. Vida passed her handkerchief over her glowing cheeks. "Come in," she called.

The butler entered with a card. It was Margaret's.

"Say I'll be right down," said Vida, taking the card from the tray.

Bess drew her jacket together, and began buttoning it. "Good-by," she said, hurriedly. "I'm much obliged for being enlightened as to my stupidity and worthlessness, but as I don't see how such a hopeless case can even start to be anything better I won't try, I'll remain sunk in all my natural depravity. Good-by, Mabel."

Vida followed her down the stairs to the door. "I have n't meant to offend you, Bess," she said; "but I see everything so differently from what I used to I can't help talking sometimes."

"You have n't *offended* me; but something very queer must have happened this summer to — to make you go on so. Come and see me when you can, only please leave your mission behind you. Ta-ta."

"Margaret," cried Vida, turning into the drawing-room. "I've never been so glad to see any one in all my life."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE Wendells left Red Rock some days before the Radcliffes, and returned to Boston. Not till then did Ethel announce the intention which she had already confided to Vida, — her determination to enter the Salvation Army. She was mistaken in thinking her family would not be distressed. Their sorrow and amazement left no doubt on that point. But Margaret, understanding something of what lay behind the action, helped reconcile the others to it, and Ethel donned the serge dress and the frightful bonnet without realizing the full amount of unhappiness she was causing. She became a cadet, which meant that she had to leave her home and live in what are called the barracks, submit to a severe course of discipline, — cooking, sweeping, scrubbing, selling “War Cries” about the streets, in saloons, anywhere and everywhere, attending all the meetings and telling of the wonders wrought in her whenever so inspired or commanded, comforting the hopeless, succoring the needy, redeeming the sinful. It meant a life of self-abnegation and devotion, — a sublime life, in many respects, despite the narrowness and bigotry to which she had in a measure to conform.

“It will help her to be working for others,” said Margaret to herself.

Margaret was to be married in the spring. The prospect, though very sweet to her, was overshadowed by Ethel’s love for Gerard. And after a while another anxiety grew upon her, a vague feeling that she restrained Gerard in some unintentional way. He was by nature very demonstrative and ingenuously frank in showing it. As he became more accustomed to the rôle of accepted lover, and got somewhat over the wonder of Mar-

garet's caring for him, the element of passion began to quicken within him, and sometimes he would give impulsive expression to his feelings by a sudden caress. Margaret would smile her sweet smile, and take it all calmly, gladly, but was utterly unable to return it except in a self-contained, inadequate manner. She wished she could abandon herself more, abandon herself as Ethel would have done, but it was impossible. Notwithstanding these slight discords she was very, very happy, and never free from a sense of deepest gratitude that so much had been accorded her.

When Vida entered the parlor, she was sitting quiet as usual, with that habitual look of calm self-control which always characterized her. Margaret never got flurried or foolishly wrought up, was always pouring oil on the waters, always bringing order out of confusion. When Vida rushed in all excited by her own eloquence and her hearers' degeneracy, Margaret's serene atmosphere was like a cooling breeze after the fever of a sirocco. Margaret had come for a special purpose connected with the altruistic labors upon which Vida was entering in a very definite way, enlisting the aid of her friends and firing them with her own zeal. Cousin Tom was of course one of the first recruits, and he interested the Mrs. Van Cortlandt to whom Bess had alluded, a clever young woman of thirty-three or four, imbued with the spirit of philanthropy. Cousin Tom, as well as Winfred, was one of her valued friends, but the Radcliffes only knew her slightly. On learning of Vida's new departure, however, she had become heartily responsive, and between them they formulated a scheme which was to be adopted at once. Part of a house was to be hired in some bad quarter not yet brought under any reforming influence. Mrs. Van Cortlandt knew two girls, one of them a hospital nurse, who had determined to devote themselves to charitable work, and it was proposed for them to live in the house and take charge of it, to which they eagerly consented. The institution was to be called the Home Settlement. Funds for the carrying on of the enterprise were liberally forthcoming. Besides what Vida and Mrs. Van Cortlandt contributed themselves, Cousin Tom and Winfred, who of course was willingly

drawn into the scheme, subscribed generous yearly sums to its support, and Clyde, always keen for any reformatory effort, added his more modest share. In addition, they all promised as much active personal co-operation as they could give. On Margaret's coming to New York she was appealed to for the benefit of her experience in regard to the practical side of the work, and had been asked to look at a house that seemed suitable for the purpose in view.

"I've never been so glad to see any one in my life," Vida repeated as she kissed Margaret. "Come up to my room where we can talk and not be interrupted. Now," she said, shutting the door of her bed-room behind them, "now tell me first about last night. Was n't it grand?"

"Yes, it was. There's no doubt but that Winfred's the genius of the time."

Vida smiled. It was good to hear his praises sung; she could have gone on singing them all day herself, but for the diffidence she felt in speaking much about him.

"We all missed you and Mr. Ives so much at supper," said Margaret. "Winfred felt very badly about it."

"Margaret, it's a shame, it's a perfect shame! You don't know how dreadful it is to be repressed in everything you want to do. Why is everything so wrong? I've just had a scene with Mabel and another girl, and it's upset me so." Then, impelled by the need of unburdening herself, she told Margaret all about it, omitting, however, those points pertaining to Winfred.

"What would you have done?" she wound up. "Just imagine your own sister marrying such a man, and imagine their wanting me to go on in the same detestable rut I'm beginning to get out of!"

Margaret spoke rather unwillingly. "If I answer, I'll have to say exactly what I think," she replied.

"Of course — that's just what I want."

"May I ask you some questions first?"

"As many as you choose."

"How long is it since you've begun to look at things as you do now?"

"About — I suppose about four months."

"And before that you felt exactly as your sister and friend do?"

"Y—e—s, I'm afraid I did."

"You never thought at all about women who have to work fourteen or fifteen hours a day, or children who are starving?"

"N—o, but I did n't understand about them in any definite way."

"If you had, would you have given up very many pleasures or luxuries to help them?"

The cross-examination was becoming decidedly pointed.

"N—o, I suppose I should n't."

"Are n't you making the sacrifice now partly because it seems a fine thing to do, and because you want to realize the expectations of a few friends?"

Vida thought of Winfred, and was silent. Now that Margaret had begun, she went on pitilessly.

"Five or six months ago would you have thought it so awful for Mabel to marry the Count de Choiseul?"

"Oh, Margaret, *no*, I should n't!"

"Would it have been impossible for you to marry in the same way yourself — because of money or title, or just for the mere sake of marrying?"

The recollection of Frank Vaughn, and her intentions regarding him, made the color flame in Vida's cheeks.

"Of course I was just as they are, just exactly."

"Then if somebody had come and talked to you as you did to them, how would you have felt?"

"*Don't*, I understand what you mean."

"It would n't have been likely to convert you to that person's views?"

Vida walked to the fireplace, and looked down at the smouldering logs.

"It seems very self-righteous to sit here and talk as if I were perfect myself," said Margaret.

"Go on," said Vida.

"I feel quite as strongly as you that women should refuse to countenance the wrong lives of men, but, Vida, even a man who leads such a life may not be all bad. Under all the evil there may be depths of truth and good that some great suffering may strengthen or some woman could find and love and bring into the light."

"There," cried Vida, impetuously, "that's the old barbarous idea! I did n't think *you*'d talk so. Why should women overlook immorality in men, any more than men overlook it in women?"

"There's no just reason, and — it's going to be different some day. But it's the spirit of love even more than the spirit of justice that must finally redeem all evil and wrong, the woman spirit that gives the inspiration and the hope to life. And, Vida, how can you and I judge a man's temptations? Besides, while the standard of virtue for men is so low, how can the average man be different?"

"And who's made the standard? Have n't men made it themselves to suit their horrible ideas; and *we've* had to accept it? Then remember the women they make outcasts! I never thought of such things before, I never realized how awful it all is, and now, when I'm beginning to, it makes me almost insane with indignation."

"It's very hard not to feel merciless when one wakes up to certain awful facts."

"Why are n't girls taught the truth; why are n't we made to see? We get a half idea of things from reading, and from hearing people talk in a vague way, and we get to know that most men don't lead pure lives; but we're made to believe it's all right, and *we* must n't mind. But when we come to *know*! I've heard, I've seen things in Boston, going about with Ethel, and it's driven me wild to understand how men degrade women and make them suffer. How can I have charity for such creatures as that awful count Mabel is going to marry?"

"You intend to go into the slums of this great city; you'll come in contact with evil you've never dreamed of, you know

nothing about yet. You'll see people, women as well as men, apparently unredeemable and without a single virtue. What do you expect to do with these poor, degraded beings if you can't feel tender and patient here in your own home? If we can't do right where we're placed, don't think we can do better anywhere else. Don't make that mistake, don't let yourself make it."

Vida grew very thoughtful, but did not answer, for Miles, the maid, came in to say that Cousin Tom and Clyde were in the drawing-room. They were to serve as escort on the slum investigation, and the girls had been expecting them.

Vida left the house in a very humble and contrite frame of mind, albeit not converted to all Margaret's tenets. Before the morning was over she concluded it must be a preordained time of chastening for her. On the way to the scene of her future labors she received some further admonishing. She and Clyde were walking together. They had become fast friends, and were always discussing all sorts of subjects together, and not infrequently disagreeing. Clyde was a born enthusiast as well as a born reformer, and naturally had some of the faults of his kind, among them a great readiness to express his opinions, and an uncompromising way of doing it. Vida, with the leaven of Margaret's conversation working uncomfortably in her mind, longed to have some balm poured upon her downcast spirit, and thought Clyde might do it.

"It's dreadfully hard," she said, "to be what one wants to be, when everything and everybody about one makes it so difficult; don't *you* think so, Clyde?"

"When people are in that fix," answered Clyde, promptly and autocratically, "it's dead sure to be the best thing for them; it's a sort of poetic justice working upon the faults in their own characters. It provides everybody with the nasty things he needs. If people are irritable, they're set down in the middle of a nest of aggravations; if they're stingy, they've got some one on hand who spends all their money; if they're extravagant, there's some one to keep the screws on. You just watch and see if it is n't so."

"But it ought to let up when a person's trying to get over the faults, when one's changed a little any way."

"Yes, to have you slip straight back again as soon as you feel comfortable. You might just as well say right out you're talking about yourself, Vida. I suppose you have changed some, yes, I admit you have, but how much? That's the question. Are you any less easily irritated, and do you want your own way any less, or yield it any more gracefully?"

"You talk as if you were all ready for Heaven yourself," said Vida. It was one thing to be lectured by Margaret, it was quite another to be lectured by Clyde.

"Now, I suppose," said the censorious moralist, wholly unmoved by her sarcasm, — "I suppose you pat yourself on the back and think what a heroic sacrifice you're making by giving up so many things to undertake this work down here. But if you look at the matter fairly, it's no sacrifice at all. It's what you want to do — or *you would n't be doing it*. If you gave up the same things for what you don't want to do, something commonplace and out and out tiresome, you might begin to think of the halo of martyrdom."

"I never said anything about martyrdom."

"No, but I bet you've thought of it."

To this assumption she deigned no reply. He felt it humane to temper his severity with a little approval. "Your intentions are sound," he said; "and now that you've started right, you'll go along, and after a while you'll do something worth doing."

"Thank you," she said. Recollection of her homily to Mabel and Bess restrained any more marked expression of her feelings.

The matter ended there; but Vida had had two plain and forcible lessons which, coming at the right time, made their impression.

"Tell me about Ethel," she said, changing the subject.

"How is she? How does she get on?"

"Talk about martyrdom, there it is for you, only such horribly mistaken martyrdom. You know how much I believe in helping the masses; but a girl with Ethel's talent ought to realize that's her first duty."

"I don't think it's our business to generalize quite so sweepingly. You can't regulate everybody's duty, and be as sure as the Pope you've made no mistake." It was a comfort to reprove his didactic spirit in some one's else behalf, if she could not do it in her own. But she did not want to open any dispute, so hastily added: "Do you all feel very dreadfully about it?"

"Well, *rather*. I was talking with Gerard yesterday; I believe he's more cut up in a way than any of us. He's ardent in his admiration for Ethel's self-sacrifice, but can hardly bear to talk of the kind of life she has to lead, and the annihilation of her career. He always said she'd make her mark, you know?"

"Does he speak much about her?"

"N—o, I don't think he does. He's sort of queer. You know he's awfully fond of Ethel, and I think he really suffers."

Vida did not pursue the subject, and the conversation turned upon other things. They had reached a very poor part of the city, and began to attract the attention accorded well dressed people in such localities. It was said to be a bad quarter, and Vida had come braced to encounter vituperation and possibly danger. It seemed a little tame to have it all reduced to an occasional jeer from a small boy, or a suggestion to some companion to "catch onter der dood and his gal." One or two bleared and bloated individuals they met looked at them more curiously than alarmingly. The house they were to inspect proved very well adapted to their purpose; and they decided to close with the agent at once. Then Cousin Tom and Clyde piloted the girls back to haunts of respectability.

"You'll be down to-morrow?" asked Margaret, as she and Vida parted from each other. "Mrs. Dinsmore told me to ask you to lunch."

"Tell her I'll come with pleasure," answered Vida, blushing because she was thinking of Winfred. "I want to call on the Greys too. Are they going home Friday?"

"Yes, and the rest of us leave at the same time. Good-by; be sure and come early."

Vida reached home at six o'clock. At seven, her father, contrary to all precedent, had not returned, so dinner was delayed half an hour. Then Aunt Georgiana ordered it to be served, in considerable surprise at her brother's unusual tardiness. At eight o'clock he was brought in unconscious, with the pallor as of death on his face. Early the next morning Vida sent a note to Mrs. Dinsmore saying she could not come to lunch as arranged, and explaining the reasons. Winfred did not bear the disappointment any better than would any other man in his situation. He had vowed that no obstacle on earth should balk him of speaking to Vida at last. Like many other people he forgot the despotism of circumstances. As soon as he heard of Vida's trouble, he sat down at once and wrote to her. However obnoxious Radcliffe might be, he undoubtedly possessed some redeeming traits in the eyes of his family, and it was to be supposed Vida would experience natural filial distress at his critical condition. Winfred expressed the sympathy and regret fitting to the occasion, then laid down his pen. In a minute he took it up again, and began writing rapidly, impulsively : —

“ You know that I love you ; you know I should have told you so to-day if you had come ; I should have told you in the theatre if I had had a chance. It would be out of place now to ask the question on which the whole happiness of my life hangs ; but I may tell you that all that lies in a man's power to do for the one woman who has become his world, I am eager to do for you, to help you, if there is any way in which I can help you, by every means possible to me. Little girl, if human will and strength could shield you, not an ugly fear should chill your heart, or a rough touch be laid upon your life. Like other men, I have had my dreams, my ideals. You have clothed them for me with divine reality. All I am has become sanctified by the breath of your spirit upon my soul. You have refined and halloed my every thought and emotion. This at least can never be taken from me, and I bless you for it. If the priceless treasure

I crave is not for me, I still owe and offer you all I long so intensely to have you accept. My heart and life are yours, Vida, to do what you will with.

“WINFRED GREY.”

The light in her eyes, the thrill in her voice on that first night of his play told him that she loved him ; and no man she did not love could ever have left his kiss on her lips. The thought intoxicated him ; yet not being serene in self-conceit, he needed the assurance of her own words before he could feel that absolute security which leaves no room for doubt. Vida received his letter in the afternoon, and her answer came by the first mail the following morning, — an adorable little note that he kissed with all the delightful, foolish exuberance which the heart pours out of its overflowing rapture. There was no dear anybody to the note, and it was only six lines long. It began with charming abruptness: —

“Thank you very, very much for your letter. It has made me very happy. Poor papa is still unconscious. I will write again.” Then, in another paragraph: “Winfred, if I could only see you ! Everything is so awful ; I want you so much !

VIDA.”

It made music in his ears the whole day, which otherwise turned out to be exceptionally disagreeable. In the afternoon he and Draper, the manager of the Cosmopolitan Theatre, were served with injunctions stopping at once the further performance of his play. Later, upon investigating Paton’s claim, Winfred was dumfounded. Paton’s play — in plot, characters, and arrangement — was identical with his own. The sole difference between the two was one of execution and of technical skill. Paton’s lacked the conciseness of action, the fitness of detail, and the vigor and beauty of dialogue so striking in Winfred’s. In short, it appeared a weak copy of a fine model. Winfred was all at sea. The resemblance was too extraordinary to be a mere freak of chance, and no possible explanation was forthcoming. He had only finished his manuscript in August ; and it had never

been out of his keeping till delivered to Draper. He had never once looked at Paton's wretched creation. It had lain unopened and unregarded in the box where Peggy had put it. But he had only his word with which to assert his innocence. He could make no satisfying defence, and every appearance pointed to a despicable theft on his part,—the theft of another man's ideas, the most contemptible of all thefts. The very originality of his plot and boldness of its treatment witnessed against any conclusion but plagiarism. Plagiarism there certainly was ; but whose ? Paton's, unquestionably. Yet how could the man plagiarize something written between May and September, after his own manuscript was finished and in Winfred's possession ? The explanation was simple, and one which later Winfred did in part guess. He had been revolving the idea of this play for some time, but other work had prevented him from writing it. In the meanwhile it grew and took shape in his mind till it assumed a definite and even detailed form, a thing which was not unusual with him. He sometimes planned the whole outline of a book or play before setting pen to paper, and his mind operated with remarkable sureness. He rarely changed any scheme or even incident he had decided upon. His drama was in this state of virtual completeness when, one day in December, before his first piece, "A Social Test," was put on, he was riding up town with a friend in an elevated train at an hour when the cars, though not crowded, are apt to be moderately full. He and the friend occupied one of the cross seats, Winfred sitting near the window. In the aisle seat directly behind him sat a man whom he casually observed, but of whom he took no further notice. The man was Richard Paton. Though Winfred's literary reputation was already established, he had not yet attained that personal conspicuousness which the tremendous success of "A Social Test" was soon to force upon him. Paton did not know him by sight ; and besides Winfred's back was towards him, and he only caught an occasional view of part of his side face. Paton could easily hear the conversation between the two men, and soon became absorbedly interested.

"I want to tell you a first-rate plot for a play," said Winfred; "I'd like to know how it strikes you. It's rather dangerously removed from conventional lines."

Thereupon he related in detail his whole drama as already completed in his mind. He gave the acts, the scenes, even a few scraps of dialogue. Paton, who for years had been pursuing the checkered career of letters and struggling with non-recognition and adverse fortune, heard every syllable with greedy ears. From youth it had been his dream to write a drama that would throw wide to him the portals of glory and prosperity, but unfortunately his invention had never caught up with his ambition. Word for word, idea for idea, he absorbed Winfred's plot with that wonderful assimilative faculty possessed by some unoriginal intellects. By easy transition Paton was extremely liable to imagine himself the natural sponsor of ideas so acquired. In addition, he frequently deluded himself with all sorts of fictions which were pleasing to his vanity or upheld his ever-disappointed hopes, and his mind crystallized about any illusion he adopted or desired to adopt, and, in defiance of fact or logic, it became to him a verity. He was entirely innocent of criminal intent regarding Winfred's plot, simply appropriated it instinctively, trembling lest Winfred should leave the train before coming to the end. But unfortunately this did not occur. Winfred had even time to elaborate some principal points in reply to his friend's questions. At a Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street the two men got out, passing through the door at the further end of the car, walking away from Paton, Winfred's back consequently still towards him; Paton went home in great excitement, the plot turning over and over in his brain, haunting him like a ghost that will not be stayed. He began to write a dialogue to fit it. The lines grew so magically under the inspiration of Winfred's story that he could n't stop writing. It never dawned upon him that Winfred might design to use his story himself. As he grew more and more into the spirit of the work, he became unconsciously more and more rooted in the idea that the plot had been devised entirely for his benefit, and had been Providentially thrown, so

to speak, on to the very tip of his pen. By right of assimilation it became Richard Paton's property, in time it became at least nine-tenths Richard Paton's own creation.

After the *furor* of "A Social Test" Winfred was of course besieged with requests for a new play from every manager and star in the country; but he refused to undertake anything at that time for anybody except Draper, who was one of his most pressing supplicants. He gave Draper the synopsis so unwittingly given Paton. Draper was delighted and wanted the play to open the fall season. Very soon afterwards, Winfred went to Meadbrook and commenced work upon it. This also happened *after* Paton's manuscript, completed with all the expedition of burning hope, had been relegated to the obscurity of the oak box. The next hardest thing to getting inside the gates of Heaven is for a great unknown to get inside the managerial attention. Poor Paton failed to induce a single manager to look at those inspired, those unsurpassable pages, teeming with Winfred's plot and originality. The enthusiastic appreciation of a few friends in no degree compensated for this criminal shortsightedness. It was doubly hard with the new dramatist, Winfred Grey's success standing out in aggressive contrast. He felt no personal vindictiveness against Winfred, for he was not of an envious disposition; he only despaired at the hardness of his own lot. Then it occurred to him to enlist Winfred's interest, and get his indorsement; and so, with the strange irony of fate, he put right into its originator's hands, the emasculated double of his own brain-offspring.

CHAPTER XXII.

“THE management regrets that circumstances compel the withdrawal of ‘At the Harvesting’ for the present. There will be no performance to-night. Those who have already bought tickets will have their money returned at the box-office either this evening or any time to-morrow.”

The announcement met the eyes of the audience crowding to the Cosmopolitan Theatre on Friday night. Radcliffe, just emerging from a comatose into a delirious state, was defrauded of the gratification which the event would have furnished him, — a delight he had lived through in anticipation many times between the reading of his Wednesday-morning paper and his encounter with Nat Watkins’ sledge-hammer fist. In the rambling garrulousness of delirium he talked about Winfred, Paton, and his own revenge with a rancor horrible to see in a man on the borderland of death. Vida, sitting beside him while the nurse was getting her dinner, heard the bitter, half-coherent words with wondering distress. They were mere ejaculations without sequence, but pieced together they made clear her father’s co-operation with Paton.

The breakfast next morning was overshadowed by the gloom which illness always brings upon a house. The usual remarks were made, and questions asked concerning the patient’s condition. Medical opinion had pronounced it somewhat improved, but still critical. In the absence of the head of the family, Julian possessed himself of the paper. Suddenly he gave a long, expressive whistle.

“Well, I’ll be darned!” he exclaimed.

Vida felt an unaccountable shock of coming disaster.

"The Governor is n't so far wrong after all. Vida, your friend's got it in the neck."

"What do you mean?"

It seemed as if something were choking her, and something rushing through her brain and dazing her.

"Grey's play has been enjoined, and the audience was turned away last night." He began reading the report aloud. "'It is difficult to believe,'" the article ended, "'that a man of Mr. Grey's great reputation can be guilty of the offence charged, and which seems substantiated by the injunction stopping the career of a play so brilliantly received. It is of course to be expected that if injustice has been done Mr. Grey, he will bring the case to trial as soon as possible, and clear himself of the wrong imputed to him. The extraordinary merit of Mr. Grey's previous literary and dramatic work testifies his entire ability to depend upon his own inspiration. Yet it must be regretfully admitted that he stands in a most equivocal position. We trust some explanation will speedily be forthcoming to vindicate the name of so distinguished a man.'"

"That's a nice business!" said Julian.

"A very nice business!" echoed Mabel, looking at Vida; "but I'm glad it's developed *now*, just when it has."

"I hope Vida will at *last* realize the impropriety and *danger* of forming acquaintances with persons she knows *nothing* whatever about," said Aunt Georgiana.

"It would be rather difficult even for us to remain entirely ignorant of Mr. Grey."

"I'm not talking of the man's *books*, though for *my* part I don't know anything about them either. I've never read one of them, and I'm sure I don't *want* to. I refer to *himself* and his social position and connections."

"If you knew more about Mr. Grey's social position you — you would not talk quite so foolishly, Aunt Georgiana."

"I've always *supposed* my years make my opinions of more value than —"

"Jingo, it's nearly nine o'clock!" broke in Julian, rudely unmindful that his aunt was speaking. He had just five minutes in which to reach Columbia College, the seat of learning to which his education had been intrusted, much to his disrelish, Harvard, and escape from paternal surveillance, being his heart's desire.

"I know Mr. Grey," said Vida, rising and standing with one hand on the table, — "I know Mr. Grey, and none of you do. If every judge and court in the land say he's done this thing, it will be false."

"Upon my word, I begin to think you must be mashed on him," said Julian, picking up his books and hurrying out.

Vida escaped to her own room. Half an hour later she emerged dressed to go out. She took a Sixth Avenue car, rode down to Tenth Street, went directly to Mrs. Dinsmore's house, and asked to see her. Mrs. Dinsmore wondered a little that she should come while her father was so ill. Vida answered her questions about him, and then, without hesitation or even change of color, said: —

"I want to see Mr. Grey; I want to see him alone. Is he in?"

For a moment Mrs. Dinsmore's surprise made her hesitate. She had suspected for some time the course things were taking between Winfred and Vida, but did not suppose it had yet reached a decisive point.

"He's up in his study," she said. "I'll go and ask him to come down."

"I'd rather go up to him," said Vida.

When she reached his door, she stopped with sudden shyness. She was doing a most unauthorized thing. With a good deal of flutter about her heart, and the color turning her cheeks very pink, she mustered courage to knock rather feebly and uncertainly.

"Come in," said Winfred.

He was sitting with the morning paper in his hand, his expression that of a man confronting calamity, thinking out the consequences, and looking squarely at them. Before he quite roused himself, Vida slowly opened the door. She stopped on the threshold, and he turned his head towards her. He sprang

to his feet, and the next second was standing before her, both her hands in his.

“Vida !”

Her eyes were fastened upon the floor, and she was blushing to the tips of her ears. He freed one hand and shut the door.

“Vida !”

Then she looked up at him.

“I — I saw it in the paper this morning. I had to come. I don’t know what you ’ll think of me — ”

“Think of you !” He stepped close to her, his eyes were afire with intense, passionate adoration. “Think of you !” he repeated, bending down till she felt his breath on her cheek. There was silence, and they both seemed to hear their own heart-beats. He put his arms out to draw her to him. With a supreme effort he checked himself and stepped back.

“Oh, my little girl, why have you come ?”

She dropped her eyes again, startled and abashed. “I — I wanted to tell you,” she stammered, “that I could n’t bear it. I had to come ; I thought I might ; but if I ’ve done wrong — ”

“No, no, God bless you for the wish to come ; God bless you for coming.” His voice vibrated with infinite tenderness. He took her hands again and kissed them very gently.

“How I love you ! How I love you !” he murmured, with an intensity that hushed his tones. “Vida, for weeks, it seems all my life, — it was only a wretched half-life before, — I ’ve thought and dreamed of you ; I ’ve worshipped you. I ’ve trembled like a coward at the thought of never being able to win you ; and I ’ve intoxicated myself hoping for the day when you ’d let me hold your hands so in mine and your eyes would look at me as they ’re looking now. I ’ve whispered to myself a million times the holiest word a man’s lips can speak — wife.” His voice thrilled as he spoke it then. “I ’ve hoped and doubted and longed — ” All at once he seemed to recollect himself. “Sit down there,” he broke off abruptly, drawing forward the arm-chair he had been using. “I ’ve something to explain to you, little girl.” He walked across the room and

stood a moment with his back to her. Then he turned, and there was about him an appearance of set purpose and forced calm. He drew a seat near her and sat down himself.

"I'm accused and virtually found guilty of one of the most dastardly pieces of rascality a man can commit. A few people who know me won't believe it. The entire public will look upon me as a miserable thief. It'll probably be a year before the case can be brought to trial, and even then, unless some explanation exonerating me is discovered, I can do nothing to help myself. I have n't the slightest clew to any explanation. I've only a vague idea that I've been overheard discussing my play by some one who's appropriated it. I remember going over it once; but I can't possibly prove the truth of my theory; I don't know that it's true myself. And I can't prove that I had planned the play at the time I speak of, because the man I was talking to died six weeks after. If the trial goes against me — and I don't see how it can go any other way — my reputation will be blackened for life."

"Winfred, don't!"

"It's not an agreeable situation."

"It's impossible! Anybody who's ever read a thing you've written knows it can't possibly be true."

"They'll begin to discover I've plagiarized every line I've published. Do you understand what it is to be branded with such unutterable meanness, to go among men and know what a miserable cur they take you for? I'm going to meet it and fight it with all the strength I've got. I've plays enough here," he struck his forehead with his hand, "to furnish this little fellow Paton with plots for the rest of his life. I will meet all that's ahead of me; but I must meet it *alone*. I've no right to wreck — any one's else life too."

She raised her eyes and looked at him. He grew pale and felt himself tremble like a child. He turned away, afraid of his own weakness.

"Winfred, you know — you know — that I love you." Her voice was low but steady.

He took her hand, which was clasping the arm of the chair, and kissed it now with burning lips. Then he raised his head and gazed at her without a word, got up and turned away from her. His resolution was being assailed in an unexpected way. He had intended to write and explain everything by letter. The strain of her presence, her look, her words, was almost beyond his power to resist.

"I came to tell you something," she said, rising and going to him, — "something you must know. My father —" she stopped as though unable to force the words past her lips. "My father — is helping this man — against you."

He turned quickly. "Your father? How do you know?"

"He's been delirious since last night," she answered, with effort, avoiding his glance.

"So he has money to back him!" he smiled a little; "the million dollars set upon my head."

"I feel as if it would kill me!"

"Why, Vida, little girl, it does n't matter; it does n't make any difference with the facts, with my position."

"My own father helping him! I begin to think he'll do *anything* to harm you; I'm afraid of him, Winfred; what shall I do, what can I do? I had to come and tell you so that you could be prepared and defend yourself from him."

"He can't do anything, dear, except give Paton money for his lawsuit; and if your father did n't, some one else would. You must n't be frightened about me; you must n't worry."

She was standing close to him, looking at him with tears in her eyes. He put out his hand and stroked her cheek.

"Oh, Vida, Vida!" The great suffering of a strong man sounded in his voice.

"Winfred!" She laid her hand upon his arm, then spoke with passionate pride and vehemence. "I'm not going to let any false shame ruin our lives. I know you would have asked me to — to be your wife if this had n't happened." She was looking at him right in the eyes. "What difference does such a lie make when people — love — each other?"

"Oh, my darling!" He moved impulsively towards her. Then, in his effort to stem the torrent surging within him, he spoke with sudden fierceness. "Even before it happened you'd have had to marry me in defiance of your father. If I asked you now to give up your family, your friends, your position, and sink to the level of a man completely, miserably disgraced, I'd be a more contemptible cad than I'm supposed to be."

"It's between you and me, Winfred; what people think or say has nothing to do with it."

"No human being can exist without taking account of people. Don't you see, can't you understand, no matter how bitter it's going to be, I can face what's before me and defy it myself; I *can't* face it for you; I can't drag *you* into it, — I cannot, I will not! Go, now, little girl, go; I can't stand it much longer."

She stood staring at him, the realization of all that he meant slowly coming to her. All her anticipated joy, all the sweet rapture of life together gone, — empty, mocking dreams that made the long blank existence before her more horrible than if they had never been!

"And it'll be *forever*?" Her voice rang with terror. "You can't know what you are saying, what you are doing. If you want to *save* me from anything, from utter misery, you'll tell me you don't mean it. Perhaps it's awful in me, I don't know if other girls would say it, but if you won't let me — let me marry you, Winfred, I'd rather die now, this minute, right here. Whatever you have to bear, I can bear it too; I *will* bear it. What does anything matter if I'm with you?"

His brain seemed on fire as he heard her. She threw her arms around his neck. He resisted a moment, then his own arms closed tight about her, her face against his breast. He lifted her head and kissed her with all the passion and pain and joy that were warring within him. But stronger than his love, stronger than his passion, another feeling grew clamorous

and tyrannous: "I will not make any woman my wife if marrying me is in any sense detrimental to her." He thought it was wholly for her sake. The self-deception was very easy and very plausible. He unfastened her arms from his neck, and drew away from her.

"Have you forgotten your letter? You said you gave me your life,— have you taken it back so soon?"

For a moment he was disconcerted, then, "Yes," he said, almost harshly, "for your own sake. Without you my life will be utterly worthless to me. I've never loved any woman but you. You've grown to seem part of myself. I can't think of anything or desire anything but that you are connected with it. Marriage, as I conceive it, I've felt I could realize with you and with you alone out of all the universe. Your very soul seems part of mine. And yet if I married you, I'd be doing you the greatest wrong I could. Now I want you to go,— I want you to go, little girl."

"And I am to have no choice in my own fate?" she said, slowly. "You settle it all, and I have no choice?"

Again he was shaken. "I must choose for you, because you'll never think of yourself, you'll only think of me."

"That is not so," she said. "I'm thinking now of myself. You've said what your life will be without me, have you thought what mine will be without you?" She still spoke slowly, looking at him till her gaze seemed to strike into his very heart.

He took her again in his arms, and laid his face against her soft, fair one. She raised her hand, and drew his head down lower.

"Don't you know," she murmured, with her lips touching his cheek, — "don't you know that I want to be your wife to share your trouble much, much more than to share your happiness; don't you know that to think of you alone and unhappy will be the greatest suffering I can ever have to bear?"

Men break women's hearts sometimes honestly doing what they think right and honorable. If they understood a little

better, there are times when, seeking to shield the woman he adores, a man would still let her make the sacrifice she pleads to make, because he would know that entwined with what he thinks its pain lives her sublimest joy.

"Oh, Winfred," she murmured, with the sound of pleading in her tones, "don't you understand at all how I love you?"

Then the struggle in his soul racked him, as the earth is sometimes racked by the fire in its own bosom. He came out of it with a hard, determined look on his face.

"No," he said, "I will not let you. After the trial — if I'm cleared —"

He went to the door and opened it. She said nothing more, only stopped on the threshold and looked back.

So men, foolish when they think themselves wise, weak when calling themselves strong, sometimes cast off God's divinest blessings, fearing or wilfully refusing to accept them.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT the close of the crisp autumn day the afternoon train from Boston drew up at the little way-station of Huxton. Only one passenger got out.

"Wall, I swan!" ejaculated a tall, elderly man standing on the platform with the local baggage-master, "if there ain't Winfred Grey's sure's ye're born! Howdy, Winfred, what brings ye up this way?"

"Hallo, Deacon, I've just come for a short visit to the farm."

"I hear as ye've done a big thing with that play of yourn. Yer fayther was sayin' they most split the theaytre over it."

"It went pretty well."

"Seems somethin's gone wrong though, eh? They 're makin' out as 'tain't yer play at all, is that it?"

"That's it precisely. Good-by, remember me at home."

As Winfred turned to go, he almost ran into a young man of colorless, clerical appearance. The young man started back, dislodging the glasses on his nose, which, however, he grabbed in time to save from falling.

"I beg your pardon," said Winfred; then, as he recognized him, "why, how do you do, Mr. Beattie?"

"Oh, ah, Mr. Grey! How do you do sir?" All at once he turned scarlet. He was pastor of the Methodist flock at Huxton, and ever since his installation the previous year had been wrestling with the devil on Winfred's behalf, praying that the misguided dramatist might awaken to the horror of his theatrical iniquities. The stage and all connected therewith were, according to his honest clerical estimate, abominations in the sight of the Lord. The pious little man had been much exalted by the vicissitude that had overtaken Winfred, and had vowed

to Providence that, if given opportunity, he would approach this sinner in the auspicious season of his affliction, and rebuke him for his wrong. Providence had taken Mr. Beattie up with a promptitude that was staggering. He broke into a cold sweat. Winfred present was quite a different quantity to deal with from Winfred absent. But a vow registered in Heaven! From such there is no escape save through the portals of Hades.

"My — my brother," stammered the reverend gentleman, "I hear you are in trouble."

"'Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward,'" said Winfred, solemnly.

"True, indeed, but man often makes his own trouble," said the frightened admonisher, gaining courage, however, at the orthodox ring of his own words. "You, Mr. Grey, have made your own trouble by lending your great gifts to a service of sin." Zeal ends by putting courage into the weakest, and besides Winfred was reassuringly passive. "As a humble servant of the Almighty, I stand here and warn you of the evil you are doing, and exhort you to turn those gifts to the service and glory of the One who gave them to you."

"Go to the devil," said Winfred, swinging around on his heel and starting up the street.

The sun was just disappearing back of the hills as he left the limits of the village where everybody he met stopped and spoke to him. He turned out of the high-road into the fields, as much for the sake of solitude as for the short cut. The sky was red with the rich crimson glow of autumn sunset; the landscape was painted in warm autumn browns with a few lingering patches of brighter coloring on the fast-stripping trees. Winfred walked briskly, for the air was sharp. The freshness of the atmosphere, the open expanse of country, the wide stretch of sky above, the sense of *truth* in the still, deep harmony of nature seemed to lift from him the oppression of the city's strife and turmoil. Quickly the red glow faded from the sky, and the gray dusk gathered and blurred the outlines of all surrounding objects into hazy softness.

It was four days since he had sent Vida from him. The sudden taking off of his play at the Cosmopolitan Theatre had produced a serious crisis in the affairs of the house, and something had to be done at once. The company was virtually the same as had appeared in "A Social Test," which it was hastily decided to substitute. Monday night the theatre was open again, and in a few days there was no doubt but that the play would draw as well as it had done in the spring. The financial loss on "At the Harvesting" was very large; and Winfred came in for a considerable share of it. Draper publicly demonstrated his absolute faith in Winfred by making it generally known that a contract had at once been entered into between them for a new play, to be produced during the next season. Then Winfred, tired and harassed, felt a feverish desire to get away from the sympathy of friends and opprobrium of the public, get away and think out and grasp the full extent of the disaster that had overtaken him.

When a man has seemed to be the absolute master of Fate and Fortune for the whole responsible term of his life, and is suddenly struck a crushing blow which he can neither resist nor return, the occurrence makes an important epoch in his experience. In the course of Winfred's strikingly successful career, if any difficulty which he had encountered failed to yield to easy measures, he had annihilated it by sheer tenacity and power of will. He had acquired a confident belief in his own security against defeat. That he had not become arrogant was owing to a natural modesty and kindliness of disposition. His whole nature was now in a state of storm and stress. His record had been so brilliant; step by step he had won his high position without an interval of failure, a moment's halting. Now he saw it all blackened by one slanderous aspersion, and his crowning triumph wrested from him in the very hour of its attainment. The work of a lifetime was befouled, and his name dishonored. The woman whose love had become the supreme ecstasy of his life he had turned from, that the cloud of his shame might not fall upon her. His pride

was humiliated to the dust, in his soul was the bitterness of outraged and helpless Justice. Yet for Paton he only felt contemptuous pity. He had no desire whatever to punish him. It was the situation he rebelled at ; the man's littleness was beneath his anger. An indomitable resolve took possession of him, — he would labor day and night to disprove Paton's fraudulent accusation by such achievements of his pen as finally would leave no need for other evidence. He looked ahead five years, ten, fifteen. When he could at last feel his object accomplished past question, would it be too late to take into his life the love now barred out ? In the silence of the empty fields and the loneliness of the coming night he groaned aloud, and then crushed back, as he had a thousand times already, the doubt of having done well when he shut the door between Vida's heart and his own, and left each to the agony of hopeless longing. Her face was always before him, sometimes bright with its old trustful look, oftener shadowed by the gaze of wondering protest with which she had left him. He stretched out his arms in passionate yearning. He felt he would give his life to hold her as he had held her that day. The last gleam of twilight faded, and, as he went up the green hillside to the farm, night closed about the still, peaceful country. Knowing it was supper-time he walked around to the dining-room at the back of the house. Lights were shining through the closed shutters. A door led directly into the room from two or three stone steps outside. Before he pushed open the door his mother, with the keen hearing or perhaps intuition of the blind, recognized his tread.

"Why, there's Winfred !" she exclaimed, rising from her chair at table, and flushing with surprised delight. The next minute she was kissing him and passing her hand lovingly over his face.

"Winfred, my son, I'm mighty glad te see ye ; but it's a surprise te have ye comin' in this way," said old Mr. Grey.

Kate kissed him, taking his hat and coat ; and he felt it was good to be home. Then he had time to notice a trim, prim old lady and a rather dyspeptic old gentleman who came forward and greeted him.

"Why, Aunt Betsy, Uncle Silas, this is an unexpected pleasure! I did n't know I'd find you here."

"We come up this mornin' te spend the night," said Aunt Betsy. "We ain't seen yer fayther and mother fur most a year; an' we thought we'd best git here 'fore the winter sot in. Law, Winfred, what hev ye ben a-doin' te yerself; ye look 's if ye 'd had the toothache or the dyspepsee fur a month a-Sundays."

"I'm tired, that's all. New York's an awful place, Aunt Betsy, — a great deal worse than toothache or dyspepsia."

Kate went herself to see about some additions to the repast for the unexpected guest. In the mean time Winfred took a seat beside his mother, who had insisted on the privilege of arranging his place. Yes, it was good to be home. The blazing wood fire, the comfortable cheer of the supper hour, the affectionate welcome from those who knew him best, were so restful that he felt the awful strain of the last week relax, and then yield almost entirely. Nobody said anything about his trouble until Aunt Betsy, with ill-starred inspiration, remarked: —

"Winfred, I hear tell's ye've ben gittin' inter a reg'lar hornet's nest with that play-actin' writin' of yourn. I allers knowed it was goin' te end up so, and now my words is come true." She folded her hands and closed her eyes with the solemnity of complete satisfaction.

It was like a sharp stab into an open wound when the pain had been soothed for a moment, but he laughed as he answered:

"You think my sins have found me out here, Aunt Betsy? Shall I have to be punished hereafter too?"

"Winfred, don't make light uf the jedgment uf the Lord. It 'd be well fur ye te learn the lesson of calamity that's come upon ye."

"Calamity can teach the best of us something, Betsy," said his mother, in her soft voice and gentle way, yet with a nearer approach to resentment than she often showed. "Calamity can teach us all something; but wisdom teaches us not to condemn what we know nothing about. Ye've never ben in a theatre in yer life, Betsy, 's I know of."

"The Lord forbid, Phoebe Grey!"

"Ye jest mind yer own business, 'stead uf meddlin' in other folks' affairs, Betsy Cummin's," testily remarked her dyspeptic partner.

"*Requiescat in pace*," said Winfred, smiling; but the spirit of his own peace had fled and did not come back.

There is one set, immutable principle guiding life on a farm, — people go early to bed in order to get up early, and they get up early in order to go early to bed. These seem to be the two prime objects of each day's existence. Before ten o'clock most of the Hill Top farm household had betaken itself to slumber. Kate, however, went with Winfred to his study, as she often did when he was home. They sat talking a long time. He told her the details of the difficulty about his play; and she strengthened and encouraged him as she had done all his life in times of trial. It was nearly twelve o'clock when she rose to go. The whole evening she had wanted to ask something, while at the same time fearing that he might not wish her to. Yet she could not bear to leave without giving him a chance to speak of it, if he chose.

"Winfred, is there anything else, anything more troubling you?" she asked as she stood by the door.

He was silent a moment, then, "I love her, Kate," he said; "you know it, I suppose — Vida."

"I've known it for a long time." She put her hand on his arm, "I understand you so well, — forgive me; but I can't help being anxious for you both. Winfred, remember, there's nothing a woman would not choose to bear rather than separation from the man she loves. You know what my life has been; and you know I'm speaking out of my own heart."

His head sank. "Don't, don't let any mistaken idea of duty, don't let your pride ruin two lives."

"I — I can't talk of it now."

"Good-night," she said.

"Good-night, Kate."

He stood motionless where she left him. It was only a minute

or two when his door opened again very softly, and his mother came in. She had lain awake till she heard Kate go, and knew he was alone, then noiselessly stole to him. She sat down and drew him beside her, and as he knelt at her feet brushed back his hair and passed her hand over his face as she loved to do.

"My poor boy, my poor boy!"

She had felt the hot tears on his cheek, tears all his power of will could not keep back. It is an awful, a solemn thing to see the soul-anguish of a strong man. He bowed his head with all its pride and majesty on his blind mother's knee, and sobbed as he had never sobbed before, even when a little helpless child. As he wept she prayed with the pleading tenderness and simple faith of a soul that has found God.

"My boy, my boy," she murmured, the tears falling fast from her own darkened eyes. Then he poured out to her all the pent-up agony in his heart, told her of his love and his struggle, his weakness and his doubts.

"Mother, mother, help me. I don't know right from wrong; I don't know whether I'm sacrificing her, or whether I'm sacrificing myself to save her. I don't know, I can't see; I've thought and thought till my mind can't reason any more." He raised his head, and he looked like a man worn by the suffering of years. "I can't make her my wife, shamed and disgraced as I am. Don't *you* see it, mother; don't *you* understand?"

"My child, my own child, ye're a strong, good man, and ye've ben my joy and blessing all yer life; but that spirit's ben yer one fault, Winfred. Sence ye were a little boy ye'd bear anything sooner than yield it. Oh, my son, if ye don't yield it now, by-and-by it'll break ye. When His children's hearts are set in their own wrong way, God ploughs and weeds them; for He'll have nothing there but love and peace. It's of yerself ye're thinking, dear, not of the sweet girl who's given ye her life, and cares nothing fur the things ye'd spare her."

"You too, mother! You all say it, but it's because you're all sweet, loving women. None of you understand the man's side; none of you know how a man feels."

“Does a man’s pride count fur more than his love? Ah, Winfred, that pride ’ll draw lines on yer face, and put a stone on yer heart that, little by little, with awful suffering ’ll crush out the pride that made its own punishment. If ye want to save yerself, my darling boy, ye ’ll crush it out now.”

“And her family? I don’t care about her father, but the rest of her family? I could have taken her from them when it was no discredit to marry me; *now* I ’d deserve all the abuse I ’d get.”

“My notion is when God’s put love in people’s hearts the duty’s most always where the love is. Her folks ain’t woke up yet to true things; it ain’t fur them to stand between ye and the happiness God’s offered to ye both, and the duties that go with it.”

Then she talked to him very gently, with the strange soul-wisdom of the old whose life has been righteous before God and man. It was a wisdom that reached deeper and higher in its simple directness than the most daring efforts of Winfred’s genius had ever carried him. There was no obstructing shadow of self standing between Truth’s clear white rays and the pure white soul that caught and reflected them. When she drew his head down and kissed him good-night, as she had always kissed him since he was a little babe on her breast, he felt that he had been listening to one speaking with authority those things whereof she knew. But of the million fiends that wreck human happiness, none dies harder than the devil of pride.

The reiterated yielding to a dominant fault of character adds a steady increase to its momentum which, could it be measured, would always be found mathematically proportioned to the extent of the fault’s indulgence. In time it may become a tyrant dictating, not only minor acts of every-day conduct, but ruling in crises where the weal or woe of a lifetime may be at stake.

The struggle went on in Winfred for three days; then he returned to town and started on a trip out West.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE disorder of the artistic soul is like the disorder of nature, getting its happiest effects through a reckless carelessness which yet, in its most wilful caprice, remains instinctively true to laws of beauty. Gerard's studio was a charmingly decorated and untidy place, quite in keeping with the popular notion of studios. Besides the necessary artist's paraphernalia, there were draperies, rugs, Eastern art treasures, couches, and cushions, a medley of things rare and beautiful, and things beautiful without being rare.

He had been painting, or trying to paint, all the morning, putting in the background to a portrait of Margaret upon which he had been busy for some days. The portrait was very highly praised, and people who knew the original said it was a fine likeness. At the same time they remarked something about it that reminded them of Ethel. They admitted a general family resemblance between the sisters, but had never seen it so distinctly before.

Gerard laid down his palette and brushes, and leaned his head against the easel as though tired. He pressed his hands to his temples, which had been throbbing and aching since early morning. Why did his head trouble him so much lately? Taking up one of the brushes again, he began outlining a face on an uncovered corner of the canvas. With a few strokes it grew into Ethel's face, and a peculiar pathos of expression gathered over it. He sighed while touching it up with fuller detail, yet did not try to paint out the sadness. Margaret was coming in a few minutes; she intended to stop in on her way to some club meeting which she had to attend; but he forgot all about it

so absorbed had he become. A little ante-room led into and was draped off from the studio. Margaret always entered this first room without knocking, so it happened that, sitting studying the sketch of Ethel, he did not hear her till she roused him, speaking from behind the *portières*.

"Gerard, may I come in?" she asked.

He started and, hardly knowing that he did so, covered the sketch with his hand, then instantly uncovered it again, rose and went forward to meet Margaret, kissing her in the gentle, quiet way he always did.

"What makes you so white?" she asked. "Are you ill, dear?"

"Ill? No, only stupid; I can't do anything to-day."

She went up to her portrait. "Oh, Gerard!" She had noticed the sketch in the corner.

"I did it just now; I was thinking of her."

"But it's so sad! Why did you make it so dreadfully sad?"

"I — I don't know." There was a vague uneasiness in his tone and manner. "Margaret, why has she changed so? What does it mean? Her expression is very sweet and beautiful, but it's not Ethel's as she used to be. Sometimes it's just like that." He pointed to the sketch.

"She's happy," said Margaret, almost as though to reassure herself. "Don't you think she's happy?"

"I hope, I pray she is. But she must have been very unhappy before she did what she has done. I think of it all the time. And now she's going away — in three or four days, is n't it?"

"Yes."

"She'll be in New York all the rest of the winter?"

"I believe so."

After a moment's silence, "She used to be here in the studio so much!" he said; "now of course she never comes. It's awful to have her taken right away from us so."

"She's coming to see you before she goes."

"Here to the studio?" He raised his head with sudden animation. "It has n't seemed the same place this winter. I never knew how I depended on her companionship till I had to do without it. Well," he sighed again, "if she's happy it's all right. There, let me give you a bench for your feet and a cushion to lean against, Saint Margaret."

As he stooped to arrange the bench for her, it made such a sharp pang shoot through his temples that a quick exclamation escaped him.

"Gerard, you *are* ill. Is it your head again?"

"Yes, but it's not so bad as sometimes."

She was out of her chair in a moment. "Why did n't you tell me? Lie down there on the couch, dear; lie right down and I'll bathe it for you."

She got some water and, wetting her handkerchief, laid it on his forehead, while he thanked her and smiled gratefully. He was always so grateful for any little kindness. He stretched out his hand for hers, and held it, lying for a time with closed eyes. Opening them after a while he looked up at her. "Kiss me," he said suddenly, with subdued intensity of tone.

She brushed back his hair and, stooping, kissed him on the forehead. For one second there was a flash of disappointed, unsatisfied longing, only for a second, then the sweet, tender look shone again in his eyes and about his sensitive mouth.

"Margaret," he said, sitting up and carrying her hand to his lips, "I always seem so unworthy of you, — of course I am, any man, the best on earth, would be; but I ought to be so much greater and better than I ever can."

"I wish, dear, you would n't talk so; it hurts me to hear you speak so of yourself; it humiliates me to have you exalt me above yourself as you do."

"That's because the sweetest, holiest saints are always meek and lowly, my Margaret!" Then he lay quiet again, looking at her. "Will Ethel be at the house to-night?" he asked when he next spoke.

"I can't tell. If she is, it'll be only for a few minutes, before her meeting, you know."

"When do you think she'll come to see me?"

"I should n't wonder if she came to-day."

"To-day?" His cheeks flushed as he spoke.

"I don't know, I only think she may. Gerard dear, do you mind if I go now? It's later than I thought; and they'll be waiting for me."

He went with her down the hall to the elevator. When he turned back alone the look in his face would have startled any one seeing it, — an expression of doubt, fear, humiliation, incredulity, all mirroring some thoughts or feelings he dared not confront.

"Margaret, Margaret, I do love you," he said aloud, standing before her picture; "I love you as I've always loved and revered and worshipped you." There was agony in his face now. "I'm crazy, crazy," he murmured, "to question it an instant. So holy, so divinely pure and good! I do love you, I always must, I always shall." And he closed his ears to the voice speaking in his heart, telling that the life-spirit is already fled from love that must fortify itself by argument.

He sat down to work again, and kept at it an hour or more, then stopped in disgust. He could not get any right effects, and was spoiling everything done before. His head was aching worse than ever, and an uncontrollable restlessness had taken possession of him. He looked at his watch. It was nearly twelve, so Ethel could not come till afternoon. Was that a knock at the door? As he stepped hastily to see, the door was pushed open, and a voice, using the same words as Margaret had used, asked: —

"Gerard, may I come in?"

"Ethel! I've been waiting for you all the morning."

"Why, how did you know I was coming?"

"Margaret told me you might. How good it is to see you here at last!"

Just as Margaret had done, she went and looked at the portrait. "It's splendid!" she said, her eyes brightening with an artist's enjoyment of a fine piece of work. "How did you get that

transparency in the flesh? It's got all the fineness and clearness of Margaret's own skin." She knit her brows a little. "There's something about it — Do Margaret and I look so much alike?"

"You notice it too, then? Everybody does."

He stood watching her while she examined the details of the painting. It caused him actual suffering to see her in the disfiguring costume of her new vocation. And yet the straight, fashionless skirt hung on her with a certain grace, and the great poke bonnet made a very softening frame to her face and enhanced the delicacy of her complexion.

"Why, that's *me*!" she exclaimed, discovering the sketch he had made of her. "Am I as — as miserable-looking as that?"

"I was miserable when I did it."

She turned quickly, and her eyes opened wide, anxiously upon him. "You, Gerard?"

"Every fellow gets down once in a while. I'm all right now."

He was smiling at her so radiantly that she could not doubt the assertion.

"It was only temporary blue devils? Oh, I forgot!" she said, with the old sparkle in her eyes; "I mustn't make flip-pant allusions to devils of any kind now, not even blue ones. Gerard, Gerard, it's good to be among paints and oil and all the delightful mess again. U—m, how delicious it smells, and how entrancing it looks! Sometimes I feel as if my hands will fly right off my arms to get at a brush again. Do you know what they are going to put me at in New York? Drawing for the 'War Cry.' Have you ever seen the 'War Cry,' Gerard? Do you know it's achievements in the way of illustration?"

Gerard groaned. "Your sacrifice and devotion make me go down on my knees to you, Ethel; but is it right to throw away your talent as you're doing?"

"It's three months since that first night in the Army hall," she said, slowly. "Vida thought, I suppose you all thought, it was only an emotional feeling that would go. Well, some

of it has gone, the first intense joy, but the deepest part has stayed. People talk about the spiritual nature, but it's all vague and uncertain; we don't know anything about it till we *feel* it in ourselves. We can lead good lives and do our moral best, and never know anything of the spiritual part of ourselves till something awakens it, and we become conscious of it as a reality. Then we begin to see a little what we're meant to be."

"And it happened to you?" He was gazing at her, trying to understand.

"Yes, it happened to me."

"I suppose everybody's felt something higher within him than his ordinary self; but it seems so intangible, and so — so intermittent."

"That's the part I mean, the real *you*, the real *I*, and when it gets free from the selfishness and wrong we've covered it over with, we seem to enter a new life, those better desires stay with us, even if we can't live up to them always. There's a wonderful secret which *I* can't unravel; I only know a change comes over you as real as any physical experience you can have."

"And it makes you happy?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered slowly, "if you're true to it; the truer you are the happier you are. But the old selfish thoughts and desires don't drop off all at once, and sometimes it's very hard to be true. At first it seems as if all the old troubles you used to have died right out of your life; but afterwards they come back, — not with the same pain quite, and you can bear them better, you don't rebel any more."

"What troubles have you, Ethel? Tell me, won't you tell me?" He bent towards her with such tender beseeching that she turned away from him.

"Everybody has some troubles, mine are in no way remarkable, and, as I told you, they're nothing like as bad as they were."

He did not persist in his questioning. "It would be selfish to regret what we've chosen," he said, "I'll try and feel differently."

"I sha'n't stay in the Army long, Gerard; it's impossible for

any one with modern brains to stay. But these people have taught me some great lessons. They're ignorant and foolish in many ways, and yet to come in contact with the spirit that animates them is coming in contact with God."

"I wish I could have some of it," he said.

"You were born with a great deal, more than any one I've ever known."

"I don't understand why everybody insists on giving me a halo," he protested, smiling. "I've *never* laid claim to one."

"It must be your eyes," she laughed. "The saintly innocence of your gaze, Gerard, has doomed you to go through life misunderstood. In reality you're probably a villain of the deepest dye. Villain or saint, do you know I'm committing not only a great breach of decorum, but also a horrible breach of righteousness in coming here alone, unattended by another poke bonnet? It's a shocking disregard of rules for which I'll be properly reprimanded if — I tell of it."

"Ethel do you mind —" He hesitated, not quite at ease in asking — "Do you mind wearing — *that thing*?" His eyes were fixed upon the bonnet.

"Mind! Does the human creature exist who would n't mind?"

"And all you have to do, — the hard manual labor and selling those — those papers?"

She buried her face in her hands and shuddered. "When you're working with people who are doing good, even if their ways are not yours, you conform to them because of the good, you put your own feelings aside."

"It all seems so different from what you're meant for, — so coarse and hard and so — so unnecessary."

"No, no, it is n't unnecessary. Every day of my life it's teaching me something," and she sighed unconsciously. "The average mortal needs such a *lot* of discipline to be toned up to the proper pitch of unselfishness and submission. Now we've talked enough about me. Talk about yourself."

"The principal thing is that I've missed you — horribly."

Her eyes brightened and her cheeks grew rosy. She could not help being glad. "We used to have nice times here," she said; then, changing the subject immediately, "You're as perfectly happy as a human creature can be, aren't you, Gerard?" she asked.

He had not yet learned the art of concealment, and there was a simplicity in his nature giving it a transparency which might be compared to that of very limpid water. Looking into his soul one could see the truth unshadowed and undistorted, no matter how deep down it lay. A cloud darkened his face, and he did not reply.

"Gerard," said Ethel, anxiously, "why don't you answer?"

He turned his eyes appealingly to her, and his voice sank very low. "I feel my utmost devotion so far beneath what she's worthy of. I can't put it into words, but there's something I can't attain to and — it troubles me — sometimes."

"I don't believe the person lives who's born with such a faculty of veneration as you," she said, while a chill dread crept over her. She knew the lack which he felt and did not understand was not in himself; then it must be in — Margaret. While his soul was filled with worship, was his heart left starving? She could not let the thought stay in her mind a moment, or it would madden her. "We've been solemn enough," she said; "I came to have one of the dear old times again, — a frivolous unregenerate time. Don't let's be serious any more. There, we'll start by dispensing with *that thing*." She pulled the great bonnet off her head, threw it recklessly into the furthest corner, and left the red-gold hair Gerard was longing to look upon revealed in all its captivating gleam and luxuriance. "Now let's have lunch. What is there in the closet?"

"Nothing much, but I'll go and get something," he answered, his face beaming responsively. "We'll have a feast, a festival —"

"An orgy," cried Ethel. "Go along then. And get cocoa; be sure and get cocoa."

"And meringues, I suppose," he said, taking his hat and

dashing off with the exuberance of a boy. If his headache was still in existence, he had completely forgotten it ; perhaps it had been mystically exorcised. Ethel smiled at his winning childlikeness. It was a trait to whose charm every one succumbed. When he had gone, she looked about the studio as a returned wanderer, after a long absence, gazes upon the scene of happiest bygone days. She walked about the room touching old familiar objects caressingly, as though they were sentient things, — a bit of pottery or carving or bronze Gerard was specially fond of, some art treasure they had unearthed together in a second-hand shop, or discovered in an auction-room, an etching he prized particularly ; she took them up and lingered over them while tears gathered in her eyes and a smile of sweet, wistful memory parted her lips. Thrown down among a heap of embroideries she found a woman's sleeveless Turkish jacket, beautifully worked in gold thread and rich colored silks. With a sudden fancy she slipped it on over her dark serge bodice, then rummaged among the scarfs and draperies lying about and, selecting several, wound them around her waist and let them hang, half covering the dark serge skirt. She looked at herself in a glass, and smiled with womanly gratification at the reflection shown, — a fantastically picturesque figure. Gerard should see her as she had been and could still be when de-salvationized. She smiled again, remembering his boundless admiration for her hair, and, inspired by the recollection, drew out the pins confining it and let it fall about her in rippling, shimmering waves, just as she had done that day at Red Rock when she had so shocked the whole Radcliffe family.

Ethel's inborn capacity for light and pleasure, though subdued by suffering, was not dead, and still asserted itself when afforded the now rare opportunity ; so she stood admiring her image in the glass, forgetful a moment of her burden of sorrow. But sorrow that has become a life-companion does not leave us long unmindful of its presence by our side. Memory soon came back to Ethel, and the light died slowly from her eyes, while the great tide of sadness and pain surged over her with added weight. In

her heart the old longing moaned, not bitterly as of old, but very wearily. She looked at the sketch Gerard had made of her. What did he mean when he said he was miserable? Thinking it over, the explanation of the "blue devils" seemed more and more unsatisfactory, and the haunting dread she had crushed down arose again with horrible insistence. She *would* not formulate the thought; she *would* banish, annihilate it. On the wall near her was pinned a water-color sketch of Gerard himself, which some fellow-artist had painted and left as a legacy. It was well done, and had caught Gerard's sunniest expression. She took it down, and, filled with the devotion and the anguish of her love, "Gerard, Gerard," she murmured, "may God give you happiness, may God keep all suffering from you!" And Gerard, entering softly to surprise her, heard the words as he stood holding back the *portières*, saw her carry the picture to her lips and kiss it, with the lingering impassioned tenderness which he had reproached himself for craving. His breath seemed to stop, and the blood rushing to his brain dazed him. He was stupefied with amazement and did not at once grasp the full meaning of what he saw; then it came to him in a flash, clear, convincing, — all he had been blind to so long he understood at last, and in the moment of the revelation his own heart was laid bare to his sight. The packages he was holding fell beside him. Ethel, starting, turned deathly pale, and his picture dropped from her hand and fluttered to the floor at her feet. They stood gazing at each other, both white, both trembling; she with fear and womanly shame at her self-betrayal, he with a nameless dismay and bewildered, unrecognized joy. At last, still speechless, he moved towards her. When he stood before her, "Ethel," he whispered almost inarticulately.

She did not read his heart yet; she only thought he was shocked at knowledge of hers.

"Yes," she said, quietly, but with a proud, sad dignity, — "yes, it's true."

"Ethel!" he repeated, and into his eyes there came a look, and in his voice there sounded a note indefinable but unmistak-

able. She stepped back and gazed at him. For a moment everything reeled before her ; then the pent-up passion of months, breaking forth, swept away restraint, and stifled every recollection, every thought but one of sudden, intoxicating rapture. She stretched out her hands to him, and, swaying forward, fell fainting into his arms. Her long hair trailed all about him, and her white face lay upturned upon his breast. He reeled himself, weak and dizzy, but fought off the feeling, and, lifting her, carried her to the couch and laid her upon it. He bent down, close, still closer, his lips had almost touched hers when he started back and sprang to his feet.

"Margaret, Margaret, Margaret!" he cried, throwing out his arms like a man struck blind, groping through the sudden darkness.

Conscience, loyalty, reverence — they were perhaps the strongest forces of his character. They had found an object of worship in Margaret, and had roused him to a sentiment of etherealized veneration for everything in her that was so pure, and womanly. Now against these forces were arrayed excited sensibilities, tyrannous emotion, love whose overwhelming tide made frightfully patent the unreality of the idealized counterfeit in which he had believed. He looked at the unconscious girl, so fair in her deathlike stillness. Her hair streamed over the cushions and down upon the floor ; her fantastic dress gave rich coloring to the picture she made. Her head was hanging too far down on the cushions. He raised it higher, trembling as he touched her. He put out his hand to loosen the tight collar confining her neck, but drew back hastily, and got up from his knees by the couch. He was about to go for some water, when she opened her eyes ; then he stepped back still further. Slowly she sat up, and understanding returned to her while again they looked at each other silently. She rose, and as she went to him, he stood with bowed head, and arms hanging passively beside him.

"What — what," she spoke below her breath, — "what must we do?"

"Margaret must never know," he said simply, but with a

note in his voice that had never been there before, a note firm, distinct.

She looked at him long and searchingly, but made no protest, then began binding up her loosened hair, unwound the scarfs from her waist, and took off the bright embroidered jacket. He stood watching her, but said nothing. The power of formulating thought and uttering speech seemed completely gone. The pain in his head was blinding him. She picked up the discarded bonnet from its corner, but did not put it on. Even at that moment she was actuated by the woman's instinctive desire to look well in the eyes of the man who loves her, and she shrank from the disfigurement of the dreadful headgear. She stepped near him, and, gazing into his haggard face, spoke with a tremor in her voice.

"I've loved you a long, long time ; I'm used to it now, I can bear it — but you ! Must *you* suffer too ? I thought that to have your love would be heaven, no matter what else happened. Now I'd give anything, *anything*, if you loved her."

He raised his eyes and looked at her helplessly. Why could he not think, why could he not speak ? Beat, beat, beat went that deafening noise in his head.

"Must it be, is it right — even to her ?"

He made a quick, appealing gesture. "Don't, don't !" he said, hoarsely.

"God help us !" she moaned. Then, with the despair of her suffering, she uttered a cry of pleading and stretched out her arms to him. He recoiled almost in horror, but the next instant sprang forward, and, drawing her to him, kissed her with all the wild abandon of overwrought, rebelling nature. When he released her his face was white and set.

"I feel like a criminal, a thief," he said. "All I am and all I have is hers. Ethel," it was like the speechless cry of a dumb, tortured animal, "help me to remember it."

"Shall I go ?" she asked.

His eyes were dull and heavy with pain as he silently bowed his head. She would have endured any known agony to feel

his arms about her, his lips pressed to hers once more ; but she went out quietly, stifling the cry of her breaking heart for his sake. While she closed the door after her, their eyes met like the eyes of souls parting on the brink of relentless, eternal woe.

He sank into a chair ; then a numb apathy, a suspension of thought and feeling crept over him. The hours of the short, bleak January day passed on and out of his knowledge ; the quick, short twilight fell, deepened into darkness, and the long night began. Outside the city noises still rumbled monotonously, and the city lamps dispelled the night gloom ; their faint glow crept through the windows ; faint sounds rising from the streets broke the silence of the now empty building. Stupor still hung heavy upon him. When at last it began to pass off, he staggered to his feet ; but his knees bent under him, and his head seemed bursting. A feverish thirst possessed him, and he tried to cross the room to get some water, but could not drag himself beyond the couch, where again he sank exhausted into unconsciousness.

With delicate, finely-strung organism, an almost morbid activity of conscience, with an ideality reaching to godlikeness, he was ill-adapted for the shocks and struggles, the errors and wrongs of human experience. For months the strain of doubt, of stifled heart-longing, of self-blame and remorse had been upon him. The test of that afternoon had found him with tense, quivering nerves, and mind dangerously troubled and excited. Under the added pressure his half-exhausted vitality gave way and collapsed. In the morning the woman who attended to the building found him still stretched upon the couch, helpless and burning with fever. She called two artists who had studios opposite his, and they sent for a carriage and took him to his rooms. The doctor was plainly anxious about him. Margaret wanted him moved to her father's house ; but, with unusual obstinacy, he refused to go. Before the end of the week he was better, and back at work. But a strange feeling in his head which had troubled him of late seemed to have grown worse, and strange ideas came into his mind, — foolish, impossible ideas that worried him, and which he did not understand. He said

nothing about it to any one, and braced every overtaxed nerve to follow the course set himself. The sunshine that had always brightened his face died forever that day of his life's great sacrifice. With the sweet light in his eyes blended a new expression of pathos; about his mouth and between his brows firm lines came, changing his old ingenuous look to one of fixed purpose. Bowing still before Margaret as the embodied spirit of all heavenly virtue, when she watched him anxiously, alarmed by the change coming over him day by day, he felt a self-reproach that expressed itself in tenderness which brought tears to her eyes. Yet every time he kissed her, at every caress he gave her, Ethel's image arose before him. He was thankful now for that calm, restrained quality in Margaret's nature that had caused him such keen pain. It made his part easier to play. He played it well without break or flaw.

CHAPTER XXV.

IT had been snowing all the morning, — soft, fluttering, fluffy snow. It stopped in the afternoon, leaving the city powdered deep enough for the sleighs to enliven the streets with their festal appearance. There was a perfect irruption of them. Vida, sitting upstairs in the library, heard the merry jingle of their bells, but without being aroused to any responsive feeling. On the contrary, it intensified the spirit of melancholy that had fallen upon her. Her father, drawn up to the fire in an easy-chair, had dozed off, so she had put down the book which she had been reading to him, and in the quiet of the room sat idly letting her thoughts stray as they would. On the table beside her lay the last "Century Magazine." She took it up, and, turning the pages, opened it at a story that bore her name as the author. It was one of the two Winfred had fathered, — the first to be published, — and had appeared a few days before. It had made a sensation, not so much because of undeniable merit, as because of its authorship. She had told no one of her entry into the field of letters, and the surprise of the unheralded achievement made a nine days' wonder throughout the entire range of her "set," as well as in her own home. And it filtered down through lower social strata whose members had a society-column acquaintance with her, or merely a vague knowledge of her existence as a "bright, particular star" of the farthest-off fashionable firmament. Her family was simply amazed. Families are always amazed when one of their members reveals qualities or capacities they have been too blind to suspect. Vida enjoyed much of the glow and excitement attending one's *début* in print; but the many sad and difficult things that had come into

her life marred the full delight she would have felt under happier circumstances. As she looked at the open pages before her, she wondered if Winfred knew that the story was out. He was away still, and had been all winter. He had never written to her, and only twice had she had word of him from Mrs. Dinsmore. He knew how she would long to hear from him, how anxious she would be in regard to him, how she would feel his silence. She marvelled that he could make her suffer so. And in other ways the winter had been hard. The theoretical "something commonplace and out-and-out tiresome" which Clyde had pictured for the timely prevention of any self-righteousness on her part had evolved into practical, daily reality. The Home Settlement had become a fact, had established itself firmly, and prospered beyond the limit of its founders' hope; but Vida had had small part in its success, other than the remitting of a monthly donation. She had contributed but little personal assistance to the work, had not become a beacon of hope and strength to the wretched, and an inspiration to the wicked. The first were being comforted, and the last reformed, without her. Stretching forth in dull, uninteresting sameness another path of labor had opened up to her, and the unmistakable voice of conscience had said: "This is the way, walk thou in it." Her father, slowly recovering from the shock and the physical injury of the attack made upon him, needed more than the attention of a paid servant whom he had no faculty to inspire with affection or interest. Aunt Georgiana's fussy ways annoyed him; Mabel, unsympathetic and self-absorbed, had no aptitude, if she had had the will, to devote herself to a querulous, exacting invalid, even though he were her father. There was no one but Vida left for the task; and so she took it up, becoming his companion, reading to him, driving with him, entertaining him as best she could, till he grew to demand her at his constant beck and call. There being much in his temperament and habit of thought that was antagonistic to her, and so little that was congenial, none of that serene happiness which often accompanies the practice of filial devotion softened her duty. Of all the bright

expectations which she had nourished, and glowing plans made for this winter, not one but had miscarried, not one but had left her to mourn its entire defeat. Occasionally, in sheer desperation, with the impulse of rebelling youth, she went to a dance, a reception, a dinner ; but once there it all seemed the weariest, dreariest kind of a twice-told tale. She felt frightened sometimes, thinking that the power to enjoy had gone from her forever. She would have borne everything, she said, borne it bravely, cheerfully, if Winfred had not withdrawn himself so completely from her life and put that dead, crushing weight of impotent, ceaseless longing upon her heart.

In a way Cousin Tom was Vida's chief support. He took her to the theatre, and out walking and driving when she could leave her father ; he would not let her sink into the rut of cheerless monotony as, in the beginning at least, she might otherwise have done. Cousin Tom was troubled, much troubled at the general situation of affairs ; but he lived in the future, buoyed up by the hope that a happy termination to the trial over the play would settle everything comfortably.

Kind and helpful as Cousin Tom was, Vida had a stronghold greater than he, a source of strength and inspiration without which she could never have faced her duties as she did, nor borne her troubles so well. The sermon which the man in Boston had preached lived in her memory, and wrought itself into her very being. At first Vida had but partially grasped its meaning. Her intuition recognized in it a deep truth ; but her nature was not yet prepared nor mind formed to comprehend all it contained. She had longed inexpressibly for some one to make its full significance clear. Margaret had helped her a little, not very much. Margaret's reasoning was always fitted to creed and dogma, and with these Vida was out of touch. Vida tried to get something from Mrs. Van Cortlandt ; but that bright woman's views of life were purely ethical. She had no comprehension of what she called "the intangibilities of spirit." Vida went to Mrs. Dinsmore with no better success. Mrs. Dinsmore — gentle, loving woman as she was — knew nothing of

religious thought outside the orthodoxy of the Episcopal church. Vida even tried Cousin Tom and Clyde. The one confessed his entire inability to form an opinion upon the theories of religion and the claims of either matter or spirit. The other took Mrs. Van Cortlandt's stand of idealized agnosticism.

It is well to be helped sometimes, well to be guided and encouraged ; but the knowledge we laboriously acquire ourselves, and the understanding we develop alone, have a firmer, more self-sustaining foundation than the knowledge and understanding based upon another's experience and instruction. Light gradually dawned upon Vida. It was won by the hungry craving of a great need, and through practical self-sacrifice. In her soul solitude the sermon, little by little, became illumined, and unfolded its deep meanings of beauty and truth to her sight. It was an explanation of her trials ; it became the anchor of her courage and endurance. Then a great desire to realize for herself this spiritual life grew within her ; and, measuring existence by the standard of divine values, she began dimly to see the relative worth of material and spiritual things. With love for Winfred possessing her whole being, his image living in every waking and almost every sleeping thought, as this new consciousness broke upon her own soul a passionate wish to have him realize it too filled her heart, and intensified day by day. She still gloried in the strength and uprightness of his nature, but commenced to estimate him more justly than had been possible while under the immediate spell of his presence and of her own poetic idealization. The course he was pursuing with her, and the really obstinate determination he manifested, revealed very clearly the reverse side of his character. She loved him none the less for it, but began to have some perception of his error and danger. She began to pray for him, and pray to be made wiser and better herself, that she might be able to explain to him this wonderful thing which she had found. She prayed in a blind, instinctive way, not to any god in man's form, but to a great, holy, loving Presence who became as real to her as her own personality, and whose transfusing spirit seemed to fill all space, fill her heart,

stilling its pain and giving her a peace that sometimes would last for hours. And she set herself definitely, as never before, to the work of conquering the wilfulness and selfishness in her own nature, soon realizing, however, in the discouragement of iterated and reiterated failure, what a Herculean task lay before her. She recalled all the sermon had said regarding the difficulty experienced in the early stages of such effort, and the need of entire self-surrender. "Thy will, not mine, be done." She began to think what that might imply, and shrunk back appalled. Suppose it meant life-long separation from Winfred, — could she say it then? The very thought seemed to make her heart stop beating. Never, never, she could never say that! But suppose Winfred or she had violated some law, and their separation was the inevitable consequence; suppose the ensuing pain was the only thing that would turn them into the right way, and make possible the development of their higher, spiritual nature. Did she want that development at such a price? She shuddered. Yet would she cut Winfred off from it if she could? Was this to be their cross? If so, surely Winfred's own mistaken act had laid it upon them. Still his course was one the whole world would indorse. How could he know he was wrong? How could she dare assert that he was? And was ignorant breaking of law as disastrous as conscious defiance? If so, it seemed terribly unjust. She found herself involved in a maze of contradictions and uncertainties, and felt the utter inability of her finite intellect to solve infinite mysteries. She stood fronting these great questions alone, undirected save by the spirit of God within her. One night, like a weary, ignorant little child, confused and with a sort of desperation, she gave up thinking, gave up wondering, and felt only that infinite wisdom *must* be back of God's laws, His infinite love must care for His children. In that hour of darkness and suffering she learned the first lesson of trust, of standing aside and not hindering the operation of those laws by any interference of her own. "Thy will be done," she murmured, with a sob in her voice. Many times of doubt and struggle followed; but for that night at least she was able to leave her future in the

hands of the ruling Power of the universe, and give Winfred over to the care of the great Father, and feel he was safe.

Now, on this January day, one of the dark times had come upon her, the times when the human almost overwhelmed the yet barely conscious spiritual nature. Outside all was sunshine and pleasure ; in the luxurious room where she sat all was stillness, inertness. She was struggling hard not to give way, not to break down weakly, or rise bitterly defiant against Fate. She was tired, not physically or even mentally, but just tired of the tiresomeness of life, tired of reading aloud books which, to her, were dull past conception, tired of staying in when she wanted to go out, tired of the quality of the family converse, of the family's petty interests, its frothy surface aims and occupations. Grown used to the brain food of the Wendell circle, and fed on the strong thought and delicate fancy of Winfred's genius, her mind was starving for lack of nourishment. She could not even read much, her father's demands upon her were so incessant ; and when she had the opportunity, she often had not the heart. She was apt to give her scant leisure to dreams of the past and wistful hopes of the future, to tears wrung from the great loneliness of her heart, and efforts to gain strength to endure it.

In addition to the established difficulties of her every-day life, a new and aggravated one had arisen within a week. Medical skill had restored Radcliffe physically so far as it could be done ; though, his knee-cap having been fractured by a brutal kick, he would be lame and obliged to use a cane to the end of his days. His nervous system did not recuperate as quickly as it should ; so the doctors decided that a period of absolute quiet and freedom from annoyance of any kind was necessary to his recovery. As this was not to be obtained in his own home, it had been decided for him to go to a sanitarium in the western part of the State, and Vida was to accompany him. The prospect was dreary enough to account for any added depression which she was feeling.

The soft coal in the fire-place, disintegrated by the heat, split apart and burst into bright flames, singing as they shot out a blue

or pale-yellow tongue. Vida laid down the magazine, and was about to rise, when her father opened his eyes. It was only four or five minutes since he had closed them. The noise of the fire, or perhaps the mere cessation of Vida's voice, roused him again from the light doze he had fallen into.

"What's the matter? Why have you stopped?" he asked, not realizing that he had been asleep.

"I'd like to go out a little while, papa; I've something to attend to before we leave to-morrow."

"Go out! You have n't been reading half an hour."

"I began at half-past one and it's after three now."

"What do you want to go for? I suppose to rush off to that ridiculous slum establishment you're so crazy about. I should think your own father was of more consequence than a lot of filthy vagabonds you've no business to come in contact with any way."

"I've no intention of going there; I have n't the time if I wished it. I want to do some shopping, and to say good-by to several people."

A sleigh which she had heard coming along the street stopped before the house. At the same moment the door of the room opened noisily, and Mabel entered, dressed to go out.

"Vida, don't you want to go sleighing?" she asked. "If you do, hurry up, for Saunders is here, and I'm all ready."

"Can't you enter a room quietly?" asked Radcliffe, shrinking irritably.

"Did I make a noise?" asked Mabel, "I did n't mean to."

"Thanks, Mabel," said Vida; "but I can't go. Is n't there any one else you can get?"

"Oh, yes, I'll go for Bess or Kitty. Well, I'm in a hurry, so ta-ta."

"Take care how you shut that door," cried Radcliffe, too late, however, to prevent the bang he dreaded. "A nice affectionate lot of children I have! I'd die between you all if I were kept here another week."

It did not matter very much, but coming on top of everything else, it was just a little more than Vida could bear.

"I've tried to do my best, papa; I'm sorry I've succeeded so poorly," and as she spoke the tears started to her eyes.

"I'm not finding fault with *you*; I'm not finding fault with you at all," said Radcliffe, with genuine compunction, — a compunction which he rarely felt. Then looking at his daughter as she walked to the window and stood with her back to him, trying to get control of herself, he suddenly realized (not quite for the first time perhaps, but more clearly than ever before) all she had been to him, all she had done for him. "Vida," he repeated, "I did n't mean you; I was n't talking of you. You — you've been a very good daughter, a *very* good daughter, and I appreciate it. If the rest were like you, I'd be a much happier man."

"I did n't mean to be so foolish; and I don't want to be thanked for anything, papa," she said, turning back into the room. The jingle of the sleigh-bells in the street below announced that Mabel had started.

A softer expression came into his face than was often seen upon it.

"When will it be your birthday?" he asked. "It must be soon."

"The day after to-morrow," she answered, wondering at the irrelevancy of the question.

"Hum! you'll be twenty-four. You ought to be married. Your mother was married at twenty-two. You're very much like her, very much. She was a beautiful woman and — a very unusual one."

He actually had almost said "and too good for me."

"What about young Vaughn? You have n't spoken of him once, and I've been too ill to ask. I thought you were going to accept him. Why have n't you?"

"If there were no other reason, because I don't love him."

"Eh! Um!" He looked as though about to combat such an unexpected and insufficient reason and then changed his

mind. "After all, it's just as well you have n't. I could n't possibly let you marry now, I need you too much."

He got up, and, with the aid of his stick, limped across the room and sat down in a chair near the window. "You may go out, if you choose," he said. "Ring for Martins first, that's all. I want to give him some orders about packing my traveling bag."

It was an unusual display of consideration on his part. Vida could never leave him except under protest. His surprising burst of unselfishness touched her.

"I won't stay any longer than I can help," she said, and then did something which perhaps she had never done before in her life except at the regulation morning and evening periods — stooped and kissed him. If she had paused to think about it, she would have felt awkward, and refrained. He looked at her silently a moment.

"You are a good daughter," he said, — "a very good daughter."

CHAPTER XXVI.

VIDA walked down Madison Avenue, the buoyancy of youth gradually overcoming her despondency, and attuning her thoughts to more hopeful issues than those she had been picturing. After the heat of the house, and the tediousness of all-day confinement indoors, it was delightful to feel the cold air strike on cheek and brow, and to enjoy the mere physical action of her limbs. The glisten of the new-fallen snow in the sunlight, its dry, crunching sound under her feet, were cheering.

She stopped at Mrs. Van Cortlandt's, to bid her good-by, attended to some shopping, and then hurried on to Mrs. Dinsmore's. Besides wishing to see Mrs. Dinsmore herself, she had some hope of finding Ethel, who intended to pass a few days with her friends on arriving in New York ; and it was about the time when she might be expected.

In the modest Dinsmore establishment family co-operation in the housework was sometimes necessary ; and Peggy answered Vida's ring at the door. Since Winfred's trouble a marked change had come over Peggy's attitude towards Vida. Immediately after his departure, her old frigid reserve had given way to an evident purpose of making herself agreeable. The elaborate attention she bestowed upon Vida, and the effort put into it were as extreme as had been her former unfriendliness. No explanation of either phase of conduct was vouchsafed, and Vida supposed it all due to some childish whim.

Peggy said that her mother was out ; but, to Vida's great delight, Miss Ethel Wendell had arrived that afternoon. After showing Vida into the drawing-room, instead of going to call Ethel, Peggy lingered in the doorway.

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"We had a letter from Mr. Grey this morning," she said, with affected carelessness.

"Did you?"

The sharp, listening ears heard the tremor in Vida's tones.

"He's in Colorado; but he's coming home next week."

Coming home just as she was going away! Her voice faltered a little as she asked, "Is he well, Peggy?"

"He did n't mention his health; but he's *very* strong, you know, so he's sure to be well."

"I suppose, Peggy, you have n't heard when the trial's coming off?"

"These things are so dreadfully delayed; it won't be for some time."

"You took care of this man Paton's play; don't you know anything about it that will help Mr. Grey?"

"Well, perhaps. I told the lawyer, and it may help. I'm to go on the witness stand."

"You're a clever little girl; and I know you'll do all you can for Mr. Grey."

"I don't think I can be called a little girl; I'm nearly sixteen," said Peggy, with dignity.

"I'd forgotten you're growing so old."

"People don't always look what they are," said Peggy, oracularly.

"You're very fond of Mr. Grey, are n't you?"

"If you'll excuse me now, I'll go and call Miss Ethel." Peggy apparently did not hear the question, and certainly did not heed it.

Coming home next week, and she would not be here! Coming home *because* she would not be? The thought cut too cruelly to be endured. She forced it from her mind; but the soreness of it stayed in her heart. She heard quick footsteps on the stairs, and, hurrying to the door, the next minute she and Ethel were greeting each other warmly.

"Tell me everything," said Vida; "begin at the beginning, and tell me everything."

When girls commence to tell each other everything, time is annihilated, place disregarded, all outside persons and interests are obliterated. Peggy, who had followed Ethel, slipped away unnoticed upstairs again to her own room. She went to the bureau, took up a framed photograph of Winfred, slowly unfastened the frame, and drew out the picture. Then she began to behave in a most extraordinary manner. She stamped on the floor, pulled a strand of her hair on one side, then a strand on the other, pulled hard so that it hurt. Finally she went to the wall and struck her head sharply against it two or three times. All the while she was scowling, her lips twitching, and her eyes moist with unshed tears. Having vented her feelings, she seized the picture, walked with firm determination to her little school-girl desk, found a large envelope, put the photograph in it, and wrote upon it Vida's name and address.

"She has n't one ; I know she has n't one," she muttered, half aloud ; "and she ought to have, so — so —" Then she broke down, flinging herself upon the floor with the empty frame in her hands, and bursting into a torrent of tears. "She *is* lovely, and she *is* beautiful, and she *is* nice !" she said it viciously, not admiringly ; "and I wish she 'd died when she was a baby, or lived in Africa or Asia or anywhere. She 's spoiled everything, and I hate her. Oh, dear, dear, dear !" She sat up and swayed back and forth, then broke out afresh, dashing the tears from her eyes. "Who ever supposed he 'd go and fall in love, when he 's got his work to think about ? It 's ridiculous ; and I never, *never* should have believed it of him. If he weren't in trouble, I 'd have nothing to do with her, nothing at all. Oh, dear, dear, dear !"

Poor Peggy, half child, half woman, not in the least understanding the psychology of her own emotions, her boundless jealousy, the devotion that made the hated intruder, Miss Radcliffe, the object of her scrupulous attention, — poor Peggy poured out her grief with all the eccentric abandon of her very peculiar character. Reserved and self-poised far beyond her years, there were, nevertheless, tempests in her nature slumbering only just beneath

the surface. Unwitting of their outbreak, in the drawing-room below, Vida and Ethel, the first excited greeting over, settled down to talk. Vida forgot completely the promise to hurry back to filial duties, forgot that it was getting late and dark, and sat with Ethel a long, long time. After a preliminary interchange of eager questions and answers, Ethel startled Vida by an abrupt announcement.

"Vida, I'm going to leave the Salvation Army."

"*You are!*"

"As long as I live I'll bless them for what they've done for me. None of you have ever understood how they could affect me as they did, nor how I could connect myself with them —"

"I did n't understand at first; but — I do now."

"Well, perhaps you do, no one else does. It was the way for *me* to get light and help. I was in a condition when no other way could have touched me. I was desperate, and needed their living, simple faith and active, warm love. My heart needed help, not my head. But it was impossible for my connection with them to last long."

"And are you going back to your painting?"

"Not yet, I *can't* yet. I want — Have you a place for me in your Home Settlement?"

"Do you mean it — *really?*"

"I mean it so really that if you have n't, it will be a terrible disappointment."

"Indeed we have, and we'll be overjoyed to get you. It's grand, Ethel, to see you giving your life in this way."

"Don't say it. There's no virtue in what I'm doing. I'd go mad if I did n't do it." She spoke passionately, then looking into Vida's face, "How people change!" she said. "Who would ever have picked you and me out a year ago for this kind of thing?"

"What is life going to be for us?" said Vida. "Nothing but sacrifice and suffering?"

"It can't be anything else for me; but for you —"

"Ethel, I've a feeling that when the change commences in

any one of us it's got to go on till it's *done*; and it frightens me to think what that may mean."

"Don't think, it's enough to live every day as it comes."

"You'll write to me, Ethel?"

"Of course."

"Do you know how I hate to go? Sometimes I feel as if I simply can't."

"We do a great many things we say we can't."

"And a great many more we say we won't. Do you ever feel abnormally wise, Ethel, as if you'd learned almost everything of life there is to learn?"

"I *have* learned a great deal."

"Yes, more than I, I suppose." Vida was silent a moment, then said in a lowered voice: "I can't speak of it much; but I think you know, and I want you to tell me about — him — Winfred — when you write."

"Yes, dear," said Ethel, very gently, "and I'll write often."

Vida rose to go. The girls kissed each other good-by, feeling that never before had they understood each other so well, and been drawn so close together.

On reaching home, Vida went into her father's room before removing her coat and hat. She found him very disturbed and nervous, and his reproaches for her tardiness smote acutely upon her conscience. But she was not responsible for his condition. During her absence he had been engaged in a transaction of much too exciting a nature for his state of mind and body. He had bargained for and finally purchased a soul, binding it for life to his service and the devil's.

Soon after Vida had left, Richard Paton had called, a thing his patron and backer, Gordon Radcliffe, Esq., had expressly forbidden his ever doing. The circumstances that led to Paton's insubordination were alarming. For six or eight weeks he had been thinking, memory and reasoning faculties operating to vital effect. In throes of fear, then of conviction, then of moral struggle, he had realized the fact that Winfred's play was Winfred's own. One day, reflecting upon the manner in which

the disputed plot had come to him, on the instant it flashed into his mind that the man who had furnished it was Winfred Grey himself. Thereupon had ensued a war to the death, — a war of bitterness and bloodshed, between the fiend plying his sophistries, arguing for silence, and the commands of conscience pointing to the bleak, cold ways of honesty. He had absolutely no evidence that the man he had overheard was Winfred; he was a fool to trouble himself with thought of such a remote possibility. All the same, he knew it was Winfred, knew it with the certainty with which truth is sometimes recognized, regardless of logical proof or tangible demonstration. To do right, meant sinking back into misery and poverty, dragging his wife and three sickly children with him; worst of all, it meant covering himself with an ignominy from which his overweening vanity shrunk in abject terror. To do wrong would insure a continuance of easy existence upon Radcliffe's bounty pending the trial, and subsequent easy existence upon damages he would recover from Winfred. It meant notoriety, what he considered fame, his recognition by the public as the originator of at least a brilliant plot. The merits of his play were already much deprecated. Small wonder that the poor, hungry, ambition-devoured, disappointment-crushed man was worn to a shadow by the tumult of contention in his own soul. Finally his native truth and honesty triumphed, and he went to Radcliffe, determined upon full confession, little dreaming but that his struggle was over, the die cast. Poor, simple creature! he had never suspected Radcliffe of any motive in the affair other than purest philanthropy and sublimest interest in art. It was a benumbing shock to find the fiend, beaten after woful expenditure of mental, and also physical vitality, suddenly reappearing, more rampantly aggressive than ever before, clothed with the body of his benefactor, and arguing through lips that offered added inducements to silence in the shape of increased bribery. When all this array of new temptations suddenly confronted poor Paton's well-nigh exhausted conscience, he laid down his arms and surrendered.

It is profitable to reflect that had he been strong enough

to resist to the end, and had he communicated with Winfred, as the last flutter of defeated conscience suggested, not only would he have saved others an infinity of trouble and pain, but, even in a material way, would have greatly benefited himself. It was in Winfred's nature to help the unfortunate ; and he could and would have done for Paton what Radcliffe could not do, — helped his special talents into the line of work for which they were suited, and made him a self-supporting, self-respecting member of society. As it was, burdened with his secret perfidy and Radcliffe's dollars, Paton never held up his head again.

Perhaps part of each erring soul's penalty for its sins may be ultimate knowledge of the blessings to which rejected paths of virtue would have led.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WINFRED passed a restless, unsatisfying winter. After travelling about the West for a while, he had accepted a friend's invitation to stay at his ranch in California. While there, he had done some writing ; but, for the first time in his life, his heart was only half in his work. When the balance of a strong nature is thoroughly disturbed, sustained mental effort is difficult. Winfred was out of joint, not only with the times, but with himself. Acutely sensible to the pain he was causing Vida, suffering intensely himself, yet clinging obstinately to the line of conduct he had marked out, — total silence as the only safeguard against his passionate longing, — he was in a state of tumult where patience and resignation are the virtues least in evidence. After a few weeks he found ranch life unbearably tedious, packed up his things, and again began rambling from place to place. It was but a short time before he wearied utterly of himself and his aimless life, and wrote to California, asking Kenyon, his friend, to join him on a trip into the Colorado mountains. Kenyon was a man of singularly balanced character, and Winfred, in his strained, overwrought state, instinctively craved contact with the calm, restful quality which he carried in his very presence. Kenyon, on his side, realizing something of Winfred's condition, willingly consented to the proposition ; and the two men, meeting in Denver, started back into the heart of the mountains for a few weeks' enjoyment of unconventionalized nature.

One morning, several days after arriving at the mining settlement chosen as their headquarters, they set out on a tramp, purposing to go through a certain cañon which, though little

known, was said to be very beautiful. True to the rare versatility of the Colorado climate, within twenty-four hours the temperature had gone from several degrees below zero to sixty-five above, melting completely a previous fall of snow, except on the mountain-tops and in such localities as were protected from the sun. The morning was a perfect one, clear and exhilarating, the atmosphere filled with the tonic of high altitude. The men struck the trail leading into and through the cañon, the entrance to which took more than an hour to reach. They found, as anticipated, that, very little sun penetrating the cañon, the snow and ice collected in it had not greatly diminished. To continue was possible, but hazardous. The ice-bound trail would be difficult to find, and more difficult to follow, leading as it often did along the edge of a sheer precipice of rock hundreds of feet high, and there was the additional danger of falling icicles and frost-detached stone. With the rashness of adventurous enterprise, and in supreme enjoyment of the wonderful scene, they decided to risk all contingencies, and go on.

Perhaps on no spot of earth is sublimity more stupendously embodied than in the vast solitudes of America's western mountains, and nowhere does it exert a more forcible influence over the mind of man. Great souls harmonize with nature's supreme grandeurs; and Winfred and Kenyon, stilled by the magnitude of the spectacle confronting them, paused to gaze upon it.

"The immensities of creation are intoxicating," said Winfred.

"To some persons; to others they're overwhelming."

"Yet man's brain can blow that wall of rock to powder, and tunnel that mountain as a child tunnels a sand hill."

Description is beggared by the magnificence of the spectacle presented as they advanced into the heart of the cañon, — the walls of towering rock, in places clean cut as with a gigantic knife, in others rugged and torn, suggesting the terrific violence of the convulsion that had ripped them asunder, the roaring torrent at the bottom, foaming white as the snow beside it, whirling in green pools, frozen motionless in great masses along the edge of

its wild mid-current. To every overhanging rock huge icicles clung in rows, shining dazzling bright where the sun struck, melting them drop by drop with its kiss of summer warmth. Upon the few bushes, and the scanty pines growing slantingly from out the fissures of the cliffs, the snow lay thick, brilliantly white against the dark under-branches and against the dark background of granite. The men stopped on a projecting ledge, with the mad torrent falling from a terraced height two hundred feet above them into a deep, smooth-hollowed basin two hundred feet below. The snow-laden trees and ledges ; the ice formed in grotesque shapes from the flying spray of the cataract ; the water gleaming and glistening as it fell, then turned to emerald liquid in the pool beneath ; the immensity of the whole ; the eerie solitude ; the rhythmic thunder of the wild fall of water, — gave the spot a weird fascination, a beauty, untamed and awful.

“A land of frozen mystery !” said Winfred. “Let the mind try to *realize* the conception which formulated this, and the power which created it, and insanity seems to crush down upon your brain.”

Kenyon did not answer. He stood with head a little raised, as motionless as the rock beneath him.

“The most marvellous thing of all is the repose underlying it,” said Winfred, — “repose springing from inexhaustible reserve force. It’s grandly done, because it’s done without effort.”

“As men work best when they work without effort ; as they live best when they live without effort ?”

“Hum ! I’ve always found the pursuit of righteousness nothing but effort. Explain your paradox.”

“People expend a thousand times more energy when they do wrong, than when they do right. Wrong creates friction ; right is harmonious.”

“It’s a kind of harmony that needs endless hard labor to attain.”

Kenyon made a deprecatory gesture. “Egotism keeps interfering, then comes the friction. You’ve no more business to in-

terfere with your life than that cataract has to interfere with its life. You're not living; you're being lived."

"Kenyon, are you really as serene as you seem?"

"Do you know anything more destructive of happiness than straining and rebelling?"

"Men are not hewn out of stone nor built out of wood."

"Do you know anything more fatal to harmonious and beautiful expression than execution without repose? I recall your own words." He made a sweeping motion, indicating the surrounding scene. "Effort is only preparatory; the process of getting back where we belong. There's a stage to be reached where effort ceases."

Winfred turned his head quickly to Kenyon, and a look as of sudden revelation came into his face. "You put that well," he said, starting up the steep path before them. As he did so he closed his eyes suddenly, and pressed his hand to them.

"What's the matter?" Kenyon asked.

"Nothing much. Lately I feel a sharp pain in my eyes every now and then, but it goes off again."

They did not continue to the end of the cañon. Progress was slow, and they also stopped frequently to enjoy the new beauties continually opening upon the sight. After two hours or more they reached a spot where the enclosing walls rose less precipitously, and were more broken up. It was quite possible to climb them and get out upon the open mountain.

"Have you noticed that it's growing very dark, and it's getting colder?" asked Kenyon.

"Yes, a storm could come up without our knowing it till it was upon us."

"What do you think of going back over the mountain? We can get out here."

Winfred assented, and when they reached the top of the cañon they saw that a storm had indeed been gathering with great suddenness, as storms do in mountain regions. It might be all they could do to get home safely. Already a few flakes of snow were falling, and the whole sky was ominous with

heavy, low-lying clouds. Nevertheless they took time to look about them a moment. The most striking impression made by the scenery of the Rocky Mountains is one of immensity and of isolation. There are few defined points, distinctly separate peaks, that the eye can view with a sense of comparison; and the detail of acute angles, and precipitous slopes, is lost in general lines of such magnificent sweep that aspects of particular irregularity and abruptness are obliterated. The sense of solitude, save near some settlement, is absolute. The comparative scarcity of vegetation, the great stretches of dark, barren rock, the entire absence of any human life or sign of its neighboring presence, produce a feeling of sublime, undisturbed loneliness.

Every man has his moments of insanity. Winfred, looking upon the Titanic panorama, felt it would not be a bad solution of life's problems to bury them there in the great solitude, under the two or three feet of snow that would have fallen by morning. But he was too physically healthy and morally vigorous a man, too habituated to conquer instead of succumb to difficulties, for the thought to be definite or persistent.

"We'd better hurry, and get out of here as soon we can," he said. Again, and apparently unconsciously, he pressed his hand to his eyes as before.

"You've done that half-a-dozen times this morning," said Kenyon. "You've been doing it ever since we left Denver. Do your eyes really trouble you?"

"They do trouble me a little. I've strained them I suppose."

"What is the feeling like?"

"A sharp pain as if a knife were run through the balls, and a burning sensation."

"Have you seen an oculist about it?"

"No, it's nothing; it'll pass off."

Kenyon looked at him closely. "I know something about the eye, and I've been watching you for the last two or three days. You ought to consult an oculist. But come, we'd better be going."

"Wait a minute. What do you mean? Tell me plainly what you mean."

"We'll talk about it later, at the house."

"No, I must hear now. Do you intend me to infer that anything serious is the matter?"

"How long have you had these feelings?"

"I can't say exactly; a few weeks I think."

"Your mother has had trouble with her eyes. She —"

"She is blind."

"Yes, I remember. How long has it been?"

"Fifteen years."

"Do you know how it commenced?"

Winfred turned ghastly white. He recollected now that when his mother had first spoken of her failing sight she had described his very feelings.

"For God's sake, Kenyon —" He could not finish. "My mother's blindness was the result of rheumatism. I've never had it."

"It takes different forms with different people. But you need n't be frightened. It will be serious if you let it go on; but if you take it in time you can stop it. Your mother probably neglected it, or was badly treated."

"Suppose —" Again he stopped, unable to ask the question, then forced himself to it. "Suppose it is too late?"

"It is n't too late; but you must stop taxing your sight at once; stop reading and writing, anything that will strain it."

"Stop living!" said Winfred, passionately. Beads of perspiration had broken out on his forehead. "Kenyon, how do you *know*?"

"Only an examination, of course, can verify my opinion; but I'm so sure that I've spoken plainly in order to make you take every precaution."

Winfred wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and straightened up as though combating a visible foe. "Confound it, you frightened me horribly. You're not an oculist, and nothing is so complicated as diseases of the eye. Come,

let's start. The settlement lies in the hollow back of that elevation. If we keep to the right, we ought to get down without much trouble ; the mountain 's not very steep on that side."

A strong north wind had sprung up, and in half an hour the snow was falling in fine, thick flakes, fast blotting out landmarks, and making an extensive view impossible.

"Our chances of getting lost are not remote," said Winfred.

"This way," said Kenyon ; "we're bearing too much to the left."

"How far do you think we're from the settlement ? About two hours ?"

"Yes ; not more, if we can keep the right direction."

They had not much trouble in making the descent. Both were accustomed to the mountains, particularly Kenyon, who had explored parts of the Andes and Himalayas unknown to the most adventurous travellers. He revealed an accurate instinct in choosing the easiest and shortest way ; and Winfred wondered several times at his wisdom in advising some apparently unnecessary turn. Invariably it facilitated their advance, or led around some impassable obstruction or dangerous cliff. It soon became difficult to see anything clearly, even within a few feet. The wind increased in violence, and blew the fine snow in their eyes. They did not talk much ; Kenyon was too occupied with their road, Winfred fighting the grim dread he could not exorcise. Blind ! The remotest possibility of such a thing was frightful beyond what language would express.

"Do you remember there's a deep ravine on this side of the mountain ?" asked Kenyon, stopping and trying to define their whereabouts.

"Yes, but I think we're well to the right of it."

"I don't think we are. I'm going to satisfy myself, if you'll wait a minute." He began cautiously examining the locality, taking but a few steps, when the snow and haze shut him from Winfred's view.

"Look out you don't tumble over any precipice," called Winfred, starting to follow him. His eyes were aching consider-

ably now, and the whiteness of the snow dazzled them. He could scarcely see a foot before him.

"Where are you, Kenyon?"

"Take care," cried Kenyon, hurriedly. "We're on the very edge of it."

As he spoke Winfred's foot struck against the snow-covered root of some tree. Trying to recover himself, he plunged forward; and the next instant Kenyon heard the snapping of branches, then — nothing.

"What was that?" he asked, but got no answer. "Grey, Grey!" he called. A great terror seized him, and, approaching the edge of the ravine he leaned far over, "Grey, Grey, Grey!"

There was a hollowness in the sound of his voice, ringing dull and dead through the awful silence, in the awful snow-bound solitude. He could not distinguish the formation or depth of the ravine, and to get some estimate of them picked up a stone and threw it downwards. It fell straight from his hand and did not strike till he heard it far below — hundreds of feet, it seemed. He tried the same thing at different places with the same result. At last, moving along still further, and peering through the haze and snow, he saw an obtruding ledge, and on it several dark objects, rocks probably, yet one might be the figure he sought. He tried vainly to find some spot down which he could climb; but the precipice was without slope and without foothold of any kind.

The horror of the frightful accident was increased by the strong personal element which entered into Kenyon's feelings. He loved this man as one great nature loves another by reason of the bond of God-created fellowship. He loved him for his innate truth and nobility, and loved him more for the still grander possibilities which he divined in him. He called once again, but not a sound returned from the hidden depths at his feet. Drawing back and closing his eyes, he stood still and silent for an appreciable length of time, an appearance of impenetrable calm gathering upon his face, and settling over his whole being.

He knew the locality they had reached ; in three-quarters of an hour he could be at the settlement. It would take more than two hours to get men and ropes and return up the mountain. For three hours Winfred would have to lie where he had fallen, perhaps dead, perhaps living, and, with regained consciousness, suffering mental and physical agony. Raising his eyes Kenyon's lips moved, and he spoke a few low words as though addressing some venerated power. Then he started swiftly, unhesitatingly, down the mountain.

Winfred opened his eyes. He was conscious of a feeling of indescribable horror ; but his mind was too confused to be capable of definite thought. He tried to move. His whole body was cramped and numbed. Shivering with cold, he stretched out his hand and felt the chill snow that already half covered him. He lay still, a heavy apathy for the time deadening all realization of the situation. Gradually he became aware of a dull pain in the head that, little by little, grew more acute, till it was so intense that at last it roused him to fuller consciousness. With much difficulty he sat up, and then saw bright crimson stains upon the white snow beside him. He put his hand to his head, and felt the warm moisture of flowing blood. Slow recollection of what had occurred, and comprehension of his terrible position, began to dawn upon him. For a few seconds he felt paralyzed, then gathered himself together and tried to collect his thoughts. He called Kenyon, and wondered at the weakness of his own voice, called a dozen times, till he fell back exhausted with the effort. A deadly fear seized him, but he fought it off. He understood perfectly that Kenyon must have gone for help ; but — would he be back in time, and could he find him when he came ? How long had he been lying there ; how long had Kenyon been gone ? He drew out his watch. It had stopped with the concussion of the fall. Ignorance of the minutes and hours that had passed seemed to add a hundredfold to the horror of the situation. The blood was flowing fast from his wound, and a helpless faintness was creeping over him. He bound his head with his handkerchief as well as possible, and

then, looking about, saw that he was lying upon a ledge some forty feet from the top of the ravine, and that his fall must have been broken by a stunted pine growing a short distance above. He did not think that any of his bones were broken, but was so bruised and stiff it was agony to move. The wind cut him through, and the snow was fast burying him. If he could drag himself back a little he would be somewhat protected. With great difficulty he succeeded in doing so, then sank down, leaning against the rock behind. His breath was coming in short gasps; his brain was reeling; the incessant, fast-falling snow dazed him. Would Kenyon return in time? Or was this the end? Was this his last scene; and was it to be played alone, unsolaced by God or man? His lips murmured the name of the woman who was longing in that very hour, as she longed every hour, every moment of her life, for one sign of his love and remembrance.

“Vida, Vida! Oh, my love, my wife!”

Never, never, never to see her again, and perhaps he had broken her heart! Had he been wrong, all wrong, selfish and cruel, utterly misguided? In the very midst of his remorse and frenzied yearning another thought came to him, a thought stirring up enraged, wild feelings of rebellion. He would die with the brand of dishonor left upon his name forever; no chance to vindicate himself by law or by that testimony of future achievement which he had resolved upon in the pride of conscious power. He would die an accused, almost a convicted thief. He raised himself passionately, struggled to his knees in spite of weakness, forgetful of the torturing pain.

“I will not, I will not die!” he cried fiercely, madly. The blood gushed forth from his wound; a dense blackness gathered over his eyes; he felt himself suffocating. Swaying forward upon his knees, he fell face downwards in the snow.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE discrepancy between our estimate of time in its flight, and time considered retrospectively, is never so marked as when the mind is laden with the burden of great suffering. The monotony of one constant thought, one unvaried state of feeling, weights time with leaden feet, while leaving memory no landmarks by which to measure its actual passage. Misery casts a haze of unreality over everything not related to its own existence. People, things, circumstances of outside life are as unnoted shadows in a world of dreams. The days drag through their weary course of duties, or of feverish efforts to drown thought and deaden pain; the nights stretch to eternities of insane anguish or dull, moaning hopelessness. Then, by-and-by, we look back and incredulously wonder at the speed with which the weeks, the months, the very years have flown since that hour when sorrow took us by the hand and led us out into the great arid deserts of life's woe.

As winter passed and spring came, as spring changed to summer, and summer died at the chill touch of autumn, many of the children of men to whom Fortune had hitherto been prodigal of smiles and sunny promises marvelled that time could drag so heavily and yet go so swiftly. Into the heart of each had crept some untoward bitterness, and time and the world were all awry.

Vida and her father spent four months at the sanatorium to which he had been ordered. She always wished those four months might be blotted from her memory. Her ceaseless attendance upon Radcliffe, precluding any other companionship; the performance of duties demanding neither physical nor mental effort, only unending patience; the check put upon her youthful spirit and impulsive, emotional temperament; anxiety as to the

future, — there was no one condition of those awful months but seemed designed to make life unendurable. And yet she bore it all with a fortitude at which she herself wondered. In May, Radcliffe was pronounced fully recovered, save for the incurable lameness ; and they returned home. Then at once ensued all the excitement of Mabel's wedding, which took place early in June. Vida filled her part of first bridesmaid with sorrow and repugnance ; but she had learned much of the wisdom of silence, and did not uselessly repeat any expression of her feelings. The nuptial magnificence was duly proportioned to the bride's very large dower and the groom's coronet, and the apparently well-satisfied pair sailed away for the crumbling, but soon-to-be-renovated château, sacred to the memory of a long line of illustrious debauchees. The dower would have been curtailed, and the château left for a while longer to its fate, if the noble count had not put a sharp veto upon the first tentative hint of such a thing. Radcliffe, still confronted by financial problems which had been pending for a year, reluctantly stood by his agreement, and bought the titled and long-lineaged gentleman at the exorbitant price which he set upon himself. It necessitated some reduction of private expenses. Again the Newport house was rented, and a cottage taken at Islip.

Vida had little opportunity to see Ethel and her few other particular friends, for immediately after the wedding she was hurried off to the cottage. She managed, however, to snatch two or three hasty interviews with Ethel and Mrs. Dinsmore, and then for the first time got details of Winfred's accident in the Colorado mountains. Ethel had written about it, but of course in such a way as to avoid disturbing her any more than necessary. When Kenyon had returned with the rescuing party, they had found Winfred insensible, and stretched upon his face, as he had fallen. Kenyon had been lowered down the precipice, and had fastened the ropes about Winfred, by which he had been drawn up, still unconscious, exhausted by exposure and loss of blood. They had made a litter of poles and cords, and carried him down the mountain. In a few days he had been able to

leave the little mining town and return to Denver ; but the trouble with his eyes had been so much aggravated that it was most painful to use them. With a torment of fear, kept to himself, he took Kenyon's advice and consulted an oculist. Kenyon had been right ; the disease which had doomed his mother to life-long blindness had attacked his own sight. The shock of the fall and the ensuing exposure had greatly increased the trouble ; but the doctor assured him that proper treatment and care would arrest it. It was absolutely necessary for him to stop work for a time, perhaps a few weeks, perhaps a few months. The disease was uncertain in its manifestations ; and the rate of improvement could not be foreseen. Winfred heard the fiat with a nervous horror, added to the natural impatient rebellion of a man of his temperament, and a stranger to physical ailment. He left Denver immediately, and returned to New York, where he consulted a celebrated eye-specialist, who gave the same verdict. As part of the treatment Winfred was ordered to wear dark glasses, and avoid strong light. He could not remain idle in the city, so went home and stayed until half distracted by the monotony of the uneventful winter days. Then he started off on another trip, to the South this time, in the company of some friends. When he got back, he was apparently fully recovered, and able to go to work again, though warned to be careful not to strain his sight. When Vida learned all these facts, she was smitten with a deeper sorrow than any she had yet known. She was robbed of her dearest right, — the right to comfort Winfred in this new and dread misfortune. If she cherished any hope of seeing him on her return, it was ruthlessly dispelled. He went to Meadbrook for the summer a few days before she got back, just as in the winter he had returned to the city when she had left. It was wrong and cruel, she felt, — cruel to himself as well as to her, for she never once doubted his love or misunderstood his action. But the test to which he put her love was nevertheless very great, and the love's survival was proof of its depth.

Ethel naturally had much to tell of the Home Settlement, which was prospering and growing apace. At first Vida pro-

tested that Ethel must be working too hard, she looked so thin, so frail and white ; but after hearing that Gerard was not well, Vida understood and said no more. No one seemed to know what was the matter with him. He kept on working and never complained ; but his headaches were alarmingly violent and frequent, and his appearance showed clearly that he was in a bad condition. He would not consult a doctor, but, finally, after much urging, was persuaded to take a trip to Europe ; and his wedding was put off till the autumn.

The summer passed cheerlessly. Vida longed infinitely, impotently, for the rest and freedom of pure, fashionless country life, — the kind of life Red Rock had revealed to her. The Wendells urged her to spend some weeks with them ; but Winfred's presence in the neighborhood made it impossible for her to accept. If she did, he would be compelled to meet her in spite of himself, or to avoid her by leaving the place during her stay. She naturally was not willing to force either issue upon him, so went to Bar Harbor instead, to visit the aunt whose invitation she had declined the summer before, Aunt Elizabeth Gurnsey, who had so successfully engineered the matrimonial fate of the now Countess de Choiseul. Aunt Elizabeth had set her heart upon duplicating and even surpassing that brilliant achievement. Having accomplished so much for Mabel, what might she not effect for a girl of Vida's striking beauty and attractions ? The heir-apparent to an illustrious English dukedom and an Italian prince of royal lineage were both on hand to try for. Aunt Elizabeth gave Vida her choice of the two. Vida declined both. Aunt Elizabeth, surprised and disgusted, remonstrated, argued with, lectured her niece, and bid the not unwilling nor unsuspecting candidates to dinners, teas, coaching parties, and *fêtes champêtres*. After six weeks of laborious effort, Vida was apparently no nearer " coming to reason " than she had been at first ; but the prince was not so laggard. He had caught fire, genuinely fallen in love. He made a formal proposal for the hand and heart of the indifferent but dazzling young American beauty. Aunt Elizabeth, never believing Vida would carry her

obstinacy to the climax of a refusal (the suitor was actually wealthy besides princely), gave him assurance of a favorable answer. Vida listened to his wooing by proxy — through the medium of Aunt Elizabeth's eloquence — and refused him flatly, unequivocally. The chagrined Mrs. Gurnsey, almost with tears in her eyes, appealed to everything that was dutiful and rational in her niece's incomprehensible character, then waxed righteously indignant, and told Vida plainly what she thought of her, and what would become of her, the fate pictured being much less alarming to the girl's perverse mind than to her prophetic relative's. Vida once more positively asserted that she would not marry the lovesick prince, and added that she would go home. She thanked her aunt for her hospitality, and for those kindnesses not rendered null and void by the obtrusion of the much-paraded prince and prospective duke. She packed her trunk, and took her departure under the ban of a displeasure never entirely removed through life. Aunt Elizabeth was careful to let the episode of the poor prince's proposal and rejection become known. It was *some* consolation, for the next best thing to marrying a prince was refusing one. There was a certain undeniable glory about the recklessness of the thing.

Vida, greatly disturbed by the incident, returned to Islip to spend some more of her youth in sorrowful thought of Winfred.

Two new stories which she had written came out about this time ; and she began to get flattering requests from various magazines for contributions from her pen. She threw herself into literary work with the energy of a mind that dares not pause to reflect upon the irony of fate and its accompanying miseries. She commenced a novel, which was engaged by a leading periodical to come out in serial form. Vida had achieved distinct success, and the path to literary honors was open to her. She had found an occupation and an interest ; but all seemed very sterile of happiness compared to the life dreamed of, and which had slipped from her so completely.

After returning from Bar Harbor she went to town once or twice to see Ethel and Mrs. Dinsmore. On one occasion she

met Margaret, who was visiting Mrs. Dinsmore, and heard that Gerard was coming home in the fall.

He got back in September, looking better, and begged Margaret to consent to their being married at once. "Unless," he said quietly, "you're afraid to marry a man whose health is as doubtful as mine seems to have become. Margaret, don't hesitate to speak plainly. I want your happiness, before everything I want your happiness!" He was absolutely honest, unactuated by personal motive, and said it all without the slightest betrayal of his own feelings.

"Hush," said Margaret, "hush, don't talk so," and her voice choked and she could say no more.

"Then we'll be married right away?"

"As soon, dear, as you wish."

The wedding was arranged for the first week in October. It was to be a direct antithesis to the Radcliffe-de-Choiseul ceremonial, — a very quiet house-wedding, to which a very few intimate friends were invited, Vida and Winfred of course being among the number. Gerard asked Winfred to be his best man. A fever of uncontrollable impatience took possession of Vida. Winfred would have to consent; and she would see him at last after the long, long year without one look into his face, one spoken or written word from him. She lived for the day of their meeting in spite of the deep sympathy and pain felt for Ethel, and dread of her friend's approaching ordeal. Gerard's ordeal she feared too; for she had half guessed, and Ethel had half revealed the truth concerning him. She was to stand a silent, unprotesting witness of sacrifice and tragedy; suffering keenly herself in the desperate trial of her friends, and yet so hungry was her own heart, so tired did she feel under the continuous strain of her own sorrow, that the occasion was looked forward to with feverish anticipation. Less than a week before the appointed time she heard that on that very day Winfred's case was to be opened in the Supreme Court. He could undoubtedly have been granted an adjournment, but made no attempt to get it. In truth, he seized upon the excuse to avoid the wedding, from which he

had seen no means of absenting himself. Vida gave way completely ; the crushing, pitiless disappointment was more than could be borne. The night it came upon her she passed in the bitterness of hysterical reproach against Fate and God. As she was to stay with the Wendells, she and Ethel went on to Boston together. Ethel delayed going till delay was no longer possible, her whole family wondering and remonstrating at her tardiness. The torture of the days intervening between her arrival and the wedding only God and her own soul could measure. She and Gerard never saw each other alone ; and he kept away from the house as much as he could. The change in his appearance shocked her terribly. The expression of his face, its abnormal pallor, his sunken temples, and lined mouth and forehead, told their own story too ruthlessly. Vida had a fear of something dreadful happening ; and it increased to such a pitch that by the wedding afternoon she was keyed up to a state of nervous tension which it was all she could do to control.

The lights were lit and the guests had arrived. Besides the immediate family, there were some forty or fifty people in the room, which was decorated with flowers and garlands. Everybody talked of the marriage with general approval. "It was so well assorted, so desirable in every way ; they had known each other so long, and were so unquestionably suited to each other. It was a union to which not a single objection could be made, except perhaps the groom's health, and that would undoubtedly improve with care." The clergyman took his place. Gerard entered with Harry, Winfred's substitute, and stood waiting for Margaret. The two bridesmaids, Ethel and Bertha, walked up the long room, Margaret following on her father's arm, an etherealizing haze of tulle covering her face. She looked very sweet and lovely, like a pure-souled saint, half-enraptured, half-awed in the presence of a supreme realization of heavenly joy.

"What is the matter with Ethel ?" one aunt asked of another, as the bride joined Gerard. "She looks — why, I never saw anything like it. She must be ill."

"I suppose she feels very much Margaret's being taken from

them," answered the second aunt. "Of course it's very hard for her; they're such devoted sisters."

"He looks terribly ill, poor fellow. I do hope he'll take a long rest and get built up properly."

The clergyman began the service. Margaret's responses came low but clear. Gerard could scarcely be heard. Several times he stopped to control a huskiness that had come into his voice. Margaret felt his hand like ice as he put the ring on her finger.

"With this ring I thee wed," said the clergyman.

Gerard looked at him as though he did not hear, a confused, vacant look. The clergyman spoke the words again; then Gerard, making a great effort, said them slowly. With drawn brow and halting voice, the rest of the response having to be repeated to him several times, he went on, "With all my worldly goods I thee endow; In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

An uneasy wonder disturbed the assembled guests. Vida's eyes were riveted upon Ethel. The girl stood like a stone image, blanched whiter than her dress, staring with parted lips at the wall opposite her. The prayer came, uttered fervently, impressively, by the gray-haired clergyman. Vida felt as if it were lasting hours. The clergyman, opening his eyes when he finished, started visibly as his glance fell upon Gerard; but he went on, making the address to the assembled company. "Forasmuch as Gerard and Margaret have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have given and pledged their troth, each to the other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving a Ring and by joining hands, I pronounce that they are Man and Wife, in the Name of the Father and —"

Gerard swung around, facing the room; his eyes were wild; they had a dazed, insane look in them. He stretched out his hands gropingly; a pitiful, inarticulate cry passed his lips, the cry of a person whose reason has ceased operating. Horror-stricken, but not yet realizing what was the matter, everybody sprang up. Gerard turned to Ethel with a helpless moan of

appeal. He threw up his arms, and, before any one could catch him, fell heavily forward. Vida rushed to Ethel, but the girl pushed her violently aside. Not a sound passed her lips ; but, sinking upon her knees beside Gerard, she lifted his head in her arms, and then dropped in a dead faint.

It seemed minutes that no one moved, or even breathed. Then all was terrified excitement. Margaret alone was quiet, standing still in her place, with bridal veil pushed back, and hands pressed to her temples.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE calendar for the day at Special Term, Supreme Court, was a long one. The case of Paton against Grey came near the end of the list.

The court-room was hot, the atmosphere almost fetid. The enormously high ceilings, blank, dirty walls, high, dirty windows, the barrenness of the place, combined to produce upon the uninitiated an emotional chill, and a feeling of personal isolation ; and this despite the fact of the room being crowded. The space railed off for those actively concerned in the day's programme — counsel, witnesses, litigants, and clerks — was literally packed. Human atoms jostled each other, elbowed each other, squeezed past each other. There was everywhere perpetual motion, and there seemed to be inextricable confusion.

One of the side-shows for the keen-eyed was a suave-mannered old lawyer in dispute with a shrewd-faced younger opponent, the subject of debate being a case in which they were concerned. The older man was on the weak but just side. The younger claimed to have the law on his. But are not Justice and Law of necessity on the same side ? Is it not here that they are married, and pronounced one and indivisible ? Is it not here that Truth confounds Untruth, and cunning Wrong, whipped and humbled, is sent creeping back to its lair in the evil heart that conceived it ?

Off at one end of the room sat Richard Paton with his counsel and witnesses, and close beside him Gordon Radcliffe.

Radcliffe's predicament was not enviable. For months he had been alternately bribing and intimidating Paton, striving to bring him into a reliable state of mind for the trial. Now that

the critical hour had come, would he stand firm? Even if his intentions were sound, — sound from the Radcliffe point of view, — how would he meet the fire of cross-examination? The situation had taken on a very ugly aspect. A confession on Paton's part, voluntary or extorted, would leave Radcliffe in a very equivocal position, implicated in a vulgarly fraudulent case of blackmail and robbery. Radcliffe wished heartily that he had controlled his thirst for revenge till it could be indulged with less hazard to himself; but he had hugged the idea of Winfred's disgrace so long that it had become a passion which blinded him to his own danger till it was too late to recede. Still he had Paton well in hand, having little by little established over him almost absolute control. Paton feared him, cringed to and obeyed him. Yet confronted with the necessity of perjury would he gain a sudden courage of desperation? The man had a conscience, — a damnably, impudently vital conscience, — which all of Radcliffe's coercion had not succeeded in killing. The fact was that Radcliffe's presence in court would insure Paton's loyalty to his bargain and hold him steady; otherwise he would unquestionably go to pieces in some way. But how could Radcliffe's interest in Paton be explained? What reason could be given for espousing the cause of a very third-rate dramatic production against the brilliant work of a recognized genius? And, worse than all, absence from his office might entail serious consequences. His affairs had reached a crisis when vigilant personal attention to some of his most speculative ventures was of the gravest importance. He was getting the different strings well in hand; a few days more and the financial situation would be mastered. A miscalculation, either tardy or premature action, and, twenty times millionaire though he were, disaster might ensue from which recovery would be impossible. The return of the boomerang hurled in the dark at Winfred had occurred at a most inconvenient moment. He *must* stand guard or it would deal him a blow he dared not meet. No wonder he was preoccupied and morose. On consulting the doctor about a vertigo which had been troubling him, he hobbled out of the

medical presence in a fury, when told to take more leisure, and above all not to worry about anything.

As the hour approached for the opening of the court, the confusion increased; more people pushed their way into the small enclosure already over full. Above the hum of voices sounded the monotonous chant of the clerk: "Gentlemen will please stop talking." "Gentlemen, please take seats." Then the words were spoken louder, clearer. The judge was on the bench; a gavel beat for order; comparative quiet was established.

Winfred, his counsel, and Draper, the theatrical manager, arrived, forced their way inside the railing, and stood leaning against it, all the chairs being occupied. Winfred turned his back to the strong light pouring in through the windows. He looked worn. His year of suffering and strain had left unmistakable signs upon his face; and gray hairs began to show among the dark brown. After a while his glance fell upon Radcliffe, the man whose enmity he had excited, and whose vengeance had been so swift and effectual. Winfred was surprised to see him, never having supposed he would dare appear openly in support of Paton.

The calendar was called and rushed through; the room became cleared, only those remaining who had part in the cases marked "Ready." The ponderous machine of the law was set in motion, — a bloodless thing, omnipotent, immutable, and withal so clumsily fashioned that, thinking it a triumphal car bearing you onward to the throne of Justice, you may suddenly find yourself caught and crushed in its confused maze of wheels within wheels, and Justice is never reached at all.

As Winfred and his friends took seats, Radcliffe looked at him with an ugly glare which he was discreet enough to suppress at once. Winfred met his eyes without either attempt at avoidance or sign of recognition.

The clerk of the court appeared callously unconcerned in the day's affairs; the stenographer might have been writing in his sleep, so little intelligence illumined his face. The judge was conspicuously inattentive, bored. And you, waiting with anxious

suspense the pleading of your cause before this high tribunal, feel rancor growing in your breast at the apathy displayed on every official countenance. To you this case is a life and death matter ; you discover that to a court of justice it is merely another tiresome question for the Law to ticket, proved or disproved, and dismiss with the greatest possible despatch. You are shocked, indignant ; but there is worse in store for you. Law, whose duty it is to make no mistakes, fails to ferret out the lie, and innocence is branded with the mark of guilt. Law, in its inadequacy, manipulated by unscrupulous cunning, defeats the purpose it was framed for, and legal right steps over to the side of moral wrong, and fraud is crowned triumphant.

The morning dragged on. One petty case after another was disposed of ; motions were argued ; papers presented for the court's signature ; " an inquest " was taken, — all in the same hurried way. Radcliffe, in a turmoil of anxiety regarding his neglected business, took advantage of the noon intermission to make a flying visit to his office, reaching it just in time to handle successfully a dangerous complication which had occurred during his absence. When he got back to court the afternoon session had begun, and a repetition of the morning's tedious wrangle was still going on. The long wait was telling on Paton. He looked feverish and unstrung. His counsel took him out into the rotunda, and walked him about to quiet his nerves. Winfred sat a disgusted spectator of judicial torpor, the law's insufficiency, and the sickening display of craft seeking its ends, good or bad, by any means, fair or foul. His counsel bent over and whispered to him. He smiled and shook his head. The lawyer became emphatic, urging his suggestion with greater insistence. The word " rehearsal " was repeated several times. At last the old look of defiant determination settled upon Winfred's face. With a movement of impatience, and final, decisive " no," he closed the argument. The lawyer shrugged his shoulders and subsided. Winfred turned to Peggy, his chief witness. It worried him that the child should be subjected to such tedious waiting ; though she showed no sign of restlessness or fatigue, and, on her part,

watched him with her habitual quaint solicitude. It was apparent that his eyes were troubling him. They burned and ached under the strong light in the room striking all day on the blank, white walls. He had closed them a moment, and was thinking that his case would not be reached that afternoon, when he was suddenly roused by the summons: "Paton against Grey, are you ready there?" Are they ready? The irony of the question after the long hours of nervous strain they had been made to endure!

Counsel, clerks, litigants, and witnesses moved forward to the bar. Overcoats were laid upon the long tables before the judge's desk. The clerks opened the bags containing the legal documents, and sorted them out for convenient use. The pleadings were handed up to his honor, who read them with a weariness induced by daily hearing of the "old, old story." The stenographer inquired of the nearest clerk the identity of the counsel, and familiarized himself with the names and faces of the contending parties. The room, almost emptied of spectators, began to fill. Something interesting was at hand, and the idle crowd lolling about the hallways anticipated entertainment. The judge looked up from his papers, nodded impatiently, and snapped out the mandate: "Now, sir, proceed with your case."

Paton's counsel was a short man, with a head broad at the crown, and a rather low forehead. His mouth was large, thin-lipped, and close-set; his eyes were small, under heavy, overhanging brows. He had been studying Winfred quietly, and got his cue from the man's proud composure and confidence. He told his client's story in plain, terse language, filling it with subtle accusation of the defendant, conveyed in poisonous innuendo. An instant's flash of scorn curled Winfred's lip; and he looked from the lawyer to the lawyer's client, noting the latter's weak chin and wavering glance. Was it likely Paton had been able to deceive the sharp student of human roguery? Winfred's blood burned hotly. He must submit to the questioning of this hired champion of trickery and lies!

Paton was called to the witness-stand. Before he rose, Rad-

cliffe bent over and whispered to him. Winfred saw the cowed look in Paton's eyes, and the nervous twitch of the mouth under the thin mustache; otherwise the man seemed self-possessed and quiet. He had been well drilled, — "rehearsal" had not been omitted here, — and gave his testimony clearly. His manner alone was against him. He either kept his eyes on the ground, or glanced furtively about the room, always looking finally at Radcliffe in a nervous, uneasy way. Once meeting Winfred's eyes, he hesitated and stammered. At the same time Radcliffe coughed a sharp, quick cough, and Paton recovered himself and went on. His testimony was damning to the other side unless it could be shaken, or Winfred could refute it. The witness of dates seemed fatal: the time when Paton began his play, when he finished it, gave it to Winfred, all coming before Winfred had set pen to paper. The manuscripts of both plays were compared, and their striking resemblance made plainly evident. Then came the dreaded test of cross-examination. Radcliffe paled, and his throat grew dry and parched. But Paton, perjured, with ruin and state-prison now involved in his detection, was braced for the ordeal. The story of the alleged origin and growth of the play in his own mind had been carefully arranged by Radcliffe and himself, and had been gone over and over till its every detail was photographed upon his retentive memory. He did not break down, and his manner, though often excited, was much less deprecatory and timid than under the direct examination.

Paton's witnesses were brought forward, — his wife, brother, and one or two friends. They all, in perfect good faith, strengthened his position, relating their knowledge of the play's development and final completion. He had read it to them piece by piece as the work progressed.

The plaintiff rested. Instantly Winfred's counsel was on his feet, asking that the complaint be dismissed. Nothing had been proved against his client; it had not even been shown that he had ever read the plaintiff's manuscript, and time and time again the coincidence of startling but perfectly unintentional resem-

blance between two independent works had occurred in the history of literature. The likeness between the plays was extraordinary, but which of the two bore in its every line the stamp of supreme and original genius? Of the men, their authors, who was the writer of prominence and reputation? Before the production of "At the Harvesting," Mr. Grey's position as a great dramatist had been established beyond dispute by the success of his first and remarkable play, "A Social Test."

The judge denied the motion, asserting that the plaintiff's testimony "had fully sustained the burden of proof." Winfred felt a shock, a sudden clear sense of the situation swept over him for the first time. He had come to brush aside a contemptible foe, had come fearlessly, strong in his right, proud in his strength. Law would uphold, Justice would vindicate him. Yes, he had seen the difficulty of his position, of bringing proof to the support of his own assertions; but the man who has never bent the knee to falsehood, cannot in his heart believe that Truth will be vanquished by Untruth. His own word, ringing clarion-toned with truth, must shatter the miserable structure of lies as the breath of concussion shivers glass. He looked over the room. The unfriendly attitude of court and listeners forced itself upon him. He saw the sneer on the lips of the attendants, taking their cue from the judge's manner, caught the glance of spectators already gloating over the sensation of his presumed guilt. In his soul clamored rebellious protest. It is the Law's axiom that a person is innocent till proved guilty, but sentence was being pronounced against him before one word had been spoken in his defence. He felt himself confronted with an intangible, antagonistic force which he could not lay hold of, and a chill dread crept from heart to brain. It was not a coward's fear, but the horror of a man struggling in broad daylight with a ghostly *Thing* so immaterial he cannot grapple or even see it, yet so real he *feels* it advancing upon him, breathing upon him, pressing down upon him, its dead weight so ponderous a giant's strength would be futile in the contest. Winfred realized that the name of this Thing was *Law*, — blind, cast-iron *Law*; Law, his rightful de-

fender, traitorously turning to attack him. The man convicted of murder, but who has not killed; the man imprisoned as a thief, but who has not stolen, — what escape have they from the bungling mandates of the Law? One rots in an unhallowed grave, the other in a felon's cell.

A black, blank despair shook Winfred's nerves, blurred his sight, and made the room dark to him. Then he straightened up and threw back his head. Over him came the sensation of a brave man at bay before a hostile mob. He took his stand, come what might. Not a word of subterfuge would he utter, not an evasion, however harmless, should be dragged from him. The integrity of his soul nothing could smirch; his self-respect was above reach of assault.

His counsel studied his face for a moment, then put Peggy on the stand. As she stepped calmly and demurely to her place there was a stir of surprise among the auditors, she looked so childishly small and young. Her self-possession was absolute. Her big eyes looked composedly at the judge, at the lawyers, and then she smiled encouragingly at Winfred. After the preliminary questions were finished, the lawyer, a clever man, who had already learned to respect Peggy's clearness of head and repose of manner, proceeded to draw from her the relation of her care of Winfred's papers. For the past year she had had entire charge of them, acting also as his private secretary. A great many people sent him manuscripts to read, and these she locked in a box, of which she kept the key. Mr. Grey could not open the box without getting the key from her. She knew he had no key to it himself; because he always made her open the box when he wanted anything from it. The manuscripts had never been disturbed since she had had charge of them.

The supreme dignity of the tiny figure, and seriousness of the intelligent young face, framed in the golden curls, brought a smile to the lips of every one. She ignored it entirely, and the big eyes glowed with an intenser light, and a faint flush began to tinge the pale cheeks.

She would know very well if anybody opened the box and

took out anything, because she arranged the manuscripts in classified bundles, each one of which she tied up separately with a peculiar and complicated knot of her own invention. She had never taught it to Mr. Grey.

She was requested to show the knot. It was admittedly most improbable that any one but the originator could tie it without instruction. This was the strongest point that had been made in Winfred's behalf. Then Peggy was questioned as to her connection with and knowledge of Paton's manuscript. She had received it herself from his hands, put it in the box with the other plays, locked it up, and finally returned it to Paton herself. Her whole testimony put Winfred in a much better position than had seemed possible. There was a decided reaction in his favor. Peggy stood the cross-examination without flinching; one damaging fact, however, was drawn from her. On a certain occasion when she had opened the box to give Winfred some of the plays which he asked for (Paton's was not one of them), she had left the room, and was gone over an hour. Not only was the box unlocked during this time, but she had left out several bundles of manuscripts, in one of which was Paton's; but when she came back the bundles were tied just as they had always been. The sentiment of the spectators oscillated. Peggy was released. Draper was then examined; but, his testimony being unimportant, he was only detained a few moments.

"Mr. Grey, please take the stand."

There was a stir throughout the room; people leaned forward in their seats, curiosity depicted on their faces. Winfred rose at once and walked to his place by the witness chair. Dusk had fallen, and the gas lamps on the judge's desk had been lit, leaving the rest of the room in a shadowy half gloom which intensified the feeling of suspense that had crept into the place. An oppressive silence succeeded the flutter of expectation. The light shone full upon Winfred, bringing out his figure prominently from the surrounding dimness. There was no appearance of effort or aggressiveness about his attitude or expression; but there was the evidence of fearless, unswerving resolve based on the

impregnable bulwark of personal integrity. Paton sat with fascinated gaze riveted upon the victim of his perjury. Could anybody possessing any powers of observation and reflection look from one man to the other and doubt where lay the guilt? Calm, his strong features showing distinctly in the gas glare, unflinching rectitude stamped on brow and mouth, earnestness darkening his eyes, Winfred was something more than handsome then, and the something was affecting the eager crowd waiting to hear him damned. His manner as he took the oath gave to the words all the solemnity and deep import of which the clerk's indecent gabble robbed them. Winfred's counsel stepped to the bar.

"Mr. Grey, will you please relate the story of your play as you conceived and wrote it."

There was a movement of surprise throughout the room at the unusual method. Winfred, who had taken his seat, began his statement in a clear voice, distinctly audible. He told the story in a few words, casting no slurs upon his miserable foe, only giving the facts as they stood, advancing his theory of having been overheard discussing his plot, and telling of the occasion when he had related it on the elevated road, — a theory, nothing more, without a single proof to substantiate or give it force. And yet, weighted with the influence of his look and manner, it gained importance, and won favorable attention. About the lips of the plaintiff's counsel lurked a faint smile. As Winfred finished speaking, his own counsel asked him one question.

"Mr. Grey, did you ever see the plaintiff's play before the writing and producing of your own?"

"I never saw it."

It ended his direct testimony. There was a firmer setting of the mouth and a wider dilation of the nostrils as he waited the opening of the cross-examination. His eyes were paining him very much; but they glowed with a steadier fire, and looked into those of his inquisitor with such a glance as duplicity can never meet. The lawyer did not meet it.

"You — er — you *never* saw the plaintiff's play before the production of your own ; but you knew it had been left for you to read ?"

"Yes."

"And was in — er — a box — kept in your private apartments ?"

"If I ever thought about it at all, I no doubt presumed it was there."

"Hum ! Have you ever been an actor ?"

Yes, he had been an actor. — Two years on the stage ? And he was very successful ? — He was successful. — The counsel could well believe it, the witness had so admirably played his part that afternoon. And he possessed rare personal magnetism, an invaluable quality in the histrionic art ; it gave such power over the feelings of an audience, inclined criticism and judgment in the actor's favor. He undoubtedly fully understood all his personal advantages.

Winfred felt his pulses beat faster at the despicable insinuations which he could not resent.

"You have a good memory ?"

"Yes."

A good verbal memory ? Yes ? Undoubtedly too, the learning of parts had still further improved it, made it more accurate. While on the stage was he known as a "quick study" ? He was ? And — er — he would be letter perfect in a long part, after reading it over a few times ? He used to be ? — Hum !

Winfred felt the web of his conviction being woven from the words of his own mouth. Were Truth and he playing a losing game ? Well, if they were, they 'd not part company ; they 'd play it out together and be beaten together.

It was clear that the witness had a very exceptional memory, the plaintiff's counsel remarked. With such a memory, the witness would probably recollect anything he read, even though he might read it but once ? — He would remember much of it. — The counsel supposed so.

"Now, how much would you remember of a book or play, say of thirty thousand words, after reading it once?"

"It would depend largely upon my interest in it."

"If you were very much interested you would remember a great deal, substantially the whole of it?"

"I should be apt to."

"If you read it two or three times there would be no doubt about it?"

"There would be none."

"When did you say you began to write your play?"

"In June."

"The plaintiff left his with you in May?"

"I don't remember."

"Ah, you *do* have occasional lapses of memory, then?"

"I frequently forget matters of no special interest or importance to me."

"Or — er — matters it is *safer* to forget?"

"I have told you what I am liable to forget."

"Then I understand you do *not* forget anything of vital importance. This question of dates is of vital importance to you, is it not?"

He did not fall into the trap.

"It is of absolutely no importance as affecting my statements."

Yes, the defendant remembered reading several plays in the latter part of May. — The time when Miss Dinsmore left the plaintiff's manuscript out of the box while the witness was alone in the room? — So Miss Dinsmore had said; but the defendant was not then aware of the circumstance.

"Were the plays which you read signed?"

"I don't remember. They were all worthless, and I had no interest in remembering."

"Another lapse of memory? Try hard now and think. Will you swear that neither was signed Richard Paton?"

"No, I will not."

"It *might* have been, then?"

"It might."

His own lawyer inwardly fumed at his quixotic adherence to the letter of truth.

The witness claimed it was in December, 1891, that he had told the plot of "At the Harvesting" to a friend? — The defendant *positively asserted* that it was in December.

"And the friend most unfortunately died *immediately* afterwards?"

"He died six weeks after."

"Is there any person *not* dead to whom you told the plot before the month of May?"

"There is no one."

"No one? You have other friends to whom you generally talk about your work?"

"No, I do not generally talk to them about it."

"You are not apt to talk much about it to any one?"

"No."

"And it was exceptional then for you to do so to this particular friend?"

"Rather exceptional."

"And you only talked to this *one* person, this person who is dead and buried? Hum! Thank you, that is all."

It was a cowardly scheme. They had not dared examine him upon facts; but with subtle cunning had plied him with such questions as made his very honesty testify against him. For a moment the animal instinct of brute retaliation seized upon him. Had it lasted more than a second he would have been at the throat of this mean hireling of low knavery. The man himself paled and drew hastily back; he noted the dangerous flash in Winfred's eyes, the tight closing of his hands, and nervous straightening of his limbs. Then there was a sudden change. Into Winfred's face came a startled expression. He rose to leave the stand and stared blankly before him.

"One minute, if you please, Mr. Grey," said his own counsel, "there are a few questions I want to ask you."

He did not seem to hear the words. His face was pallid,

even his lips were colorless. A drawn look of intense pain creased his forehead. He pressed both hands to his eyes, staggered forward gropingly, and fell headlong down the steps leading from the stand.

They rushed to him. "Fainted!" "Drunk!" "Paralysis!" were the hurried, half-whispered explanations of the frightened crowd.

"Mr. Grey, Mr. Grey!" cried a terrified voice, and Peggy pushed her way to his side.

Blind! Struck blind! An old trouble returned! A murmur of horror and pity went through the room. He struggled to his feet, and freed himself from the pressure of the crowd around him.

"It's nothing, nothing. Let the case go on. I'm *not* blind, it was only for a moment. The case *shall* go on."

Even as he spoke he bent his head and the sweat of agony stood on his brow. The judge leaned over and spoke to the clerk.

"Witnesses in the case of Paton against Grey," called the clerk, "will return here to-morrow morning at half-past ten o'clock without further notice."

Winfred turned in protest to the court.

"Hear ye! Hear ye! Hear ye!" droned the crier. "All persons having business with this Special Term of the Supreme Court know ye that said Court stands adjourned until to-morrow forenoon at half-past ten o'clock, at which time draw near and give your attention, and ye shall be heard!"

The play was over, all save the tag left for the morrow. Had it been tragedy or farce? Whichever you choose, each actor and spectator may label it to his taste. And this one finished another 'll be given, — a little different version of the old piece, the old characters with a new caste. Will you come? There 'll be the same swaggering figure of blustering Wrong, the same creeping shadow of half-veiled Craft, the same harassed impersonation of struggling Truth. And Justice, with bound eyes, will again sit patiently waiting her turn to come on, sadly repining that her part is so small.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE crisis came at the end of the third week, was passed successfully, and Gerard began to get better. He would not die but when the delirium of fever had subsided certain conditions became apparent which made his life-grant seem a disaster rather than a boon.

Margaret was alone in the sitting-room. She was sewing, making some garment for one of her mission children. Margaret was much changed. Her face was very thin, giving the features accentuated sharpness, and there was a pinched look about the corners of the mouth. She sewed on steadily, without raising her eyes from her work. The motion of her hand, sending the needle in and out, and drawing through the thread, was so uniform it varied no more than the action of a machine ; nor did it cease when Ethel opened the door and came in.

Ethel was changed also. The experience she had gone through, and the discipline she had been under, had produced results that were moulded into her very being and stamped forever upon her countenance ; but the singular calm which, for the past year, had characterized her expression was not so settled as formerly. There was tragedy in her face, intensity of thought and emotion. Dissembling was a thing of the past. She had dissembled long and well, but the need for it was gone, and she grasped the liberty which full exposure gave. Everything was known ; everything was laid bare. There remaining nothing to hide, she obeyed a commanding impulse to be what she was, to show herself as she was. The reaction from months of repression carried her to instinctive revolt against any further disguise.

As Ethel advanced into the room, Margaret looked up, but still did not interrupt her sewing.

"He's gone to sleep," said Ethel.

Margaret made no answer; Ethel remained standing, her hand on the back of a chair.

"I went to see Dr. Wood at his office this morning."

Again Margaret looked up, this time betraying a suspensive interest. "What for?"

There was a strained pause before Ethel answered.

"To ask the truth."

Margaret said nothing.

"*You*, of course, know it already. I — I —" There was a dry, choking sound in her voice. "I — knew it too; but I went hope — hoping I *might* be wrong." She shuddered with a cold spasm of agony.

Margaret's lip trembled a little, but she sat motionless.

"There's one chance for him — one. I suppose you know that too?"

"What do you mean?"

"If — if he can be happy — without anxiety or trouble —"

"Go on."

"For a long time — a year — two years, he may recover."

Margaret bowed her head.

"Margaret," there was a fever in the girl's voice and eyes, "what are you going to do?"

"What, in God's name, can I do?" Margaret's voice was sharp in its note of anguish.

"We have n't talked yet. We've got to do it — sometime — now if you will."

The wife (the mockery of that name) shrunk back with a faint cry of protest.

"For — him," said Ethel.

"What have *I* to say? What have *I* to do?"

"When he's able, he must go away."

"And you want me to take him? Has he, even in his de-

lirium, asked for me once? What good will it do him to go with me?"

"I — did not — mean — that."

"Then say what you do mean. You need n't be afraid. What do you suppose I've been doing these four weeks? When day and night your name has been on his lips; when you have been sitting in my place beside him, — what do you suppose I've been thinking? When the fever passed and the delirium and — and he did not remember — talks of me, thinks of me as though nothing of the last year and a half had ever happened —" She did not speak bitterly, only in a dull, set way. "What can *I* do; what power have *I* to save him?" she asked.

"Then let me." Ethel spoke low, but in the intentness of her feeling stepped nearer to Margaret.

"You? How?"

"People trouble him; but he's happy with me, perfectly happy. He lies there still, with the old sweet look on his face as long as I sit beside him. If any one comes in he's disturbed and uneasy till they go again. He — he seems to imagine people mean to — take me away. It — it's one of the ideas. He grasps my hand, and holds me while any one's in the room."

Margaret's features were fixed; her lips tight-closed from the effort of self-control.

"It seems brutal to go on," said Ethel; "but unless you understand —"

"Go on."

"He thinks — he believes we're — we're engaged, and they — you — the family want to break it off. He talks about — being married — by-and-by, when he's strong again. He's afraid of you all, and begs me to go away where none of you can reach us."

Margaret's lips set closer, tighter. "I don't see yet what you want me to do."

"It is you who are to act for him, to decide for him; it is

you who have the right. I want you to let *me* go with him — away to some place where he'll be quiet and at peace — with nothing, no one he'll fear, alone with me."

Margaret laid down her work, smoothly folded, rose and walked across the room. Ethel turned and watched her.

"He'll never get well unless you do. It may save him — nothing, *nothing* else will — save him from life-long insanity. Margaret!" The word was spoken pleadingly, with a sob in her voice.

Margaret turned and faced her. "Oh, do you suppose there's anything I'd not do to save him, anything that's possible, that's right?"

"Right! Anything is right, everything is right that may help him."

"I say nothing against it; you may do as you wish; but — have you thought of yourself? It can't be done without the world knowing."

"Myself! Myself! Don't talk of me, talk of him."

"Father, mother, the whole family — do you think they'll let you?"

"I'm no child, I'm a woman; and I choose to give him my life. I can do what I will with my own life. And what am I doing? Taking care of a man as helpless as an infant. Let any one make harm of it if they will. Father and mother are too broad-minded to stand in the way of — of his only chance. Perhaps it can be done without any one knowing. For their sake, for your sake, we can try. Some place way off in the country where no one can possibly know me."

"Do it if you think best. Oh, Ethel!" Her voice broke from its dry monotony into a pitiful, appealing wail.

"My sister!" There was a moan in Ethel's words.

They did not touch each other. A kiss, the embrace of clinging arms, — it was impossible. The barrier of the awful situation stood between them, insurmountable, unyielding. With that one cry of the woman hearts in sister breasts, both instinctively drew back again, shrinking even from tacit acknowl-

edgment of the unnatural relation in which they were placed to each other. They receded quickly to the one common ground where they could meet, and could recognize a common object, — Gerard's welfare.

"When will you go?" asked Margaret.

"As soon as he's strong enough, if you are willing."

"They let him sit up to-morrow?" The words were a question; she spoke them as one interrogating a better informed and higher authority than herself.

"Yes."

Margaret seemed to reflect. Her thoughts drew her lips together again, and creased lines between her eyes.

"By-and-by, if he gets well —" She stopped for several seconds. "He is married — to me. I — am powerless to undo that. When he remembers — if the truth comes back to him — Merciful Father, I'd willingly die if I could!"

"Margaret, Margaret!"

"What is there before him, even if he gets well?"

They could not keep themselves out of the discussion; it was obviously impossible. Personal feelings had to be set aside. Ethel looked at Margaret with a searching gaze, hesitated, and then said abruptly: "You can't want — you don't expect —"

Margaret shrunk as with acutest pain.

"Forgive me, Margaret, I didn't think so; but we must speak plainly, we must be sure we understand each other. You never expect or desire to live with him? It would be no happiness to you?"

"Happiness! No, I never expect or desire — for his sake and my own — to make any claim upon him beyond — what neither of us can escape."

"Then — then — I am not thinking of myself, at least I'm trying not to. You and I have the same desire — his good."

"We know each other, Ethel; you need make no explanations. What do you want to say?"

"His happiness, and therefore his hope of — recovery are

bound up — in me. If, after he gets well, he's under the same strain as before, a worse one if possible, it will probably bring back the same conditions. Dr. Wood admitted it; and if he breaks down again, he'll never get over it. Oh, Margaret, when I think of you, what you have been through — But nothing can make it worse, and nothing can make it better; all you can do is to help him."

Margaret listened with a questioning look which gradually turned to one of perplexity.

"This marriage is no marriage; free yourself and him from a miserable tie that can only be a curse to you both. It can surely be done; there must be some way to do it, to do it legally."

"No marriage!" A red tinge mounted slowly to Margaret's cheek. She spoke as one stunned by a word not fully comprehended. "No marriage!" she repeated, a rising thrill of outraged feeling, faith, conviction sounding in her tones. "Two people speak the holiest of all vows in the presence of their God, whose minister pronounces them man and wife, and — there is no marriage!"

"Is marriage only a ceremony?"

"No, it is a sacrament. And you ask me to disregard it as though feelings, wishes are all that make it binding. I can break my ties legally! Can man's laws cancel God's laws? Do you expect me to commit the sacrilege of violently putting asunder what God has joined together? If I considered my own peace, my own desires, and had no belief in the sanctity of the marriage service, do you suppose the unhappy woman lives who would quicker than I escape the hopeless, helpless position I've been blindly led into?"

"And his peace, his sanity, perhaps — don't you consider them?"

"I will do all any God-fearing woman can do for him, — I need no urging to it; but I will not be guilty of a crime even for him. I will never make any demand upon him, never see him again if it is best; you may help him in any way you

choose; I consent to it all; but—I am—his wife—and I must remain his wife as long as I live.”

“I respect legal ties as much as you; I have n’t asked you to disregard any. The law has provided such a thing as divorce.”

“I should be his wife if all the legal forms in the world separated us. You forget the Church recognizes only one cause for divorce.”

“The Church! What has the Church to do with it? The law of your country recognizes the human right to undo a fatal mistake; and you presume to oppose the justice and pity that have made it possible! The thing that lifts the union of man and woman from pure animalism to the divinest relation on earth is love. How many *marriages* without one gleam of love to purify them has the Church sanctioned? The Church would allow you to live together, degraded to the level of the brutes, and call it *purity*. To be consistent, you should come down to that level; if Gerard recovers, live with him as his wife, and brutalize yourself and him.”

Ethel spoke with impetuous vehemence. Margaret, troubled and distressed, heard her to the end. “It is such fallacies as you are talking that would turn the world into a cesspool of license,” she said.

“No, Margaret, it is such bigotry as yours that drives human beings to defiance and law-breaking. Think, think what you are doing,”—it was the entreaty of anguish,—“keeping a man whose very sanity depends on his freedom, keeping him a miserable slave for life to your personal views and prejudices, and when you yourself would be thankful to have the wretched tie undone; you acknowledge that. How do you *dare* do it, Margaret, dare wreck a fellow-creature’s life to satisfy a morbid, false reverence for the claims of an arrogant priesthood against the claims of humanity and decency? What God has joined together! In not living with Gerard, you either deny God’s wisdom and morality, or you practically admit He has nothing to do with joining you together. You give yourself the lie to

the assumed power of ceremony to make any man and woman husband and wife in defiance of truth and purity."

"You are blasphemous. I will not listen to you."

"Will you tell me what constitutes marriage in your view of it?"

"Oh, stop, stop! I am worn out; we are as wide apart as the poles. Your conscience is not mine; I must, I *will* follow my own." She stretched out her hands wearily, beseechingly.

Ethel pitied her, but she could not spare her. "You say you love him. Is this your idea of love? Sacrificing him to narrow self-righteousness?"

At last the suffering woman was stung to self-defence. "I have borne everything, — the torture, the shame; I've consented to all you've asked that I can consent to, I've not spoken one word of reproach or complaint, and God knows I have cause enough for both. You drive me to desperation. What right had you to leave me in my fool's ignorance, to let me go on to the wretched end you think to undo now at your will? What right had you, had he, to make me the miserable, heart-broken woman I am?"

Ethel's head drooped. "We thought it for the best; we did it for your sake." She would not say that her own judgment and principles had condemned it. She shared with him the error and the wrong.

"And you disposed of my life, let me become an unloved wife; and now, against all I hold most sacred, you try to force me to become a divorced one! For the last time — that sin I will never be driven into. Do you think it easy for me to be true to my beliefs when I realize as clearly as you what it may mean to — to Gerard? You question my love because I put my principles first — you must if you wish; only remember my love has a sanctioned right yours can never possess. To me your position is incomprehensible. You may and should help Gerard in every allowable way; but that you permit yourself to love a man who is bound to another woman, and without an

effort to conquer it! Is this in accord with the religion you've professed? I believe you've been sincere; but you certainly can't pretend to such feelings and views now."

"You've never understood the experience I've been through. The religion I believe in makes no one an unreasoning creature. It is something which perhaps you can't very well judge, Margaret."

"No, neither can I control your conscience. Leave *me* my liberty of conscience too, the same liberty to judge for myself that I leave you. I give up everything else. I can and will do no more."

It was the cry of a soul that at last gives voice to the pain it has long stifled in its own bosom. Ethel stood pale, suffering with, and for her sister, but strong still in her own convictions, actively at war with the attitude Margaret took, braced by the one leading thought and purpose of her life, — Gerard's deliverance from the terrible fate overshadowing him. Margaret's scruples left her to compass that deliverance unaided. She spoke more quietly but coldly. Margaret's tenacity seemed to her monstrous, with a fellow-being's reason hanging in the balance.

"Then I must save him alone!" she said, and her face gathered a strange glow of exalted emotion. "Very well, I do not think I am sorry." She spoke low, solemnly, as if consecrating herself to a holy task. "You are wrong, I don't question your love; but it is different from mine. As you say, we must each obey our own conscience. I can do anything to save him which I may have to do, — *anything*." She dwelt on the word till it gained a vibrative sound. "If it is necessary, the only way —" She looked at Margaret, her eyes alight with a radiance of self-devotion, "you shall have the cause your conscience needs; and I shall feel myself the truer woman of the two."

Somebody knocked and pushed open the door.

"Mr. Harley is asking for you, Miss Wendell," said the nurse who was in attendance upon Gerard.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ONE November afternoon Bess Huntington drove over from Bay Shore to ask Vida to dine and spend the night with her, and Vida, having no valid excuse for refusing, accepted.

It was four weeks after the trial of Winfred's case. Notwithstanding the pressure of her own anxieties Vida, at Ethel's urgent request, had remained with the Wendells several days after the tragedy of the wedding. She got a meagre account of the trial from the Boston papers, but heard nothing about it directly, nor about Winfred himself, for Cousin Tom happened to be away from New York at the time, and there was no one else to write to her on the subject. Pending the decision of the court, Vida sometimes felt that the suspense would drive her distracted; but she found salvation in work, and applied herself energetically to the novel.

The dinner at the Huntingtons' was pleasant enough of its kind, an impromptu little affair with only a quartette of guests. Vida left early the next morning, reaching home before her father had started for town. The library door was open as she passed through the hall, and he was sitting in the room. Her long attendance upon him had established a friendliness between them which had not existed before. She stopped on the threshold to speak to him.

"Good-morning, papa, are n't you going to the city to-day?"

"Good-morning, my dear. Yes, I'm going later, but not till the eleven-ten train. Come in, come in, I've something to tell you."

She unbuttoned her jacket and sat down near him.

"What is it?"

"I hope you'll profit by the lesson, and never again make acquaintances you know nothing about." He compressed his lips, put the tips of his fingers and thumbs together, and tapped them against each other, while an unpleasant light appeared in his eyes. "I heard it yesterday; to-day it's in all the papers. This Grey man you were indiscreet enough to know at Red Rock is shown up at last as the worthless rascal I supposed him."

He had no suspicion of anything more than a passing acquaintance between Winfred and his daughter, and was only telling the story because it sounded so good to his own ears; he wanted an auditor,—any auditor who would or must listen.

"The case of that unfortunate person I've helped somewhat—Paton, Richard Paton—was decided yesterday, decided as it should be, in Paton's favor."

Vida turned dizzy and for a moment could not speak. "In Paton's favor!" she finally stammered.

Radcliffe looked at her in astonishment, then leaned forward and asked quickly, harshly: "What's the matter with you?"

"In Paton's favor!" she repeated.

"What interest have *you* in the case?"

The habit of concealment restrained her a little longer. She did not answer.

"Do you know him still; have you anything to do with him? Did you want *him* to win?"

She rose. The contest between them had come at last.

"You called Winfred Grey a scoundrel and a rascal to me once before, papa. I will never quietly listen to it again. Winfred Grey is an honorable man, and he is my friend."

She faced him without a quiver, drawn up to her full height. He had risen also and was standing close to her.

"Your friend! Since when have you contracted *friendships* without my approval or knowledge?"

"Since last summer."

"How much friendship have you bestowed upon this *honorable* gentleman?"

It was unseemly perhaps, but his emphasis reminded her comically of Mark Antony orating against Brutus. She smiled a little, and the smile not unnaturally exasperated him.

"Do you intend to answer me? With how much friendship have you favored this person?"

"With more than I've favored any one else in my life."

Radcliffe was too angry to sustain the ironical. "What do you mean to imply?" he asked fiercely.

"I imply nothing. I simply answer your question."

"Then you'll answer a few more. How well do you know this man?"

"Very well indeed."

"And you stand there and deliberately tell me so?"

"You asked me; did you not?"

"You've deceived me; you've hidden this thing from your family? You can have had only one reason for doing it,— you fully recognized the questionable character of the individual whose society you were cultivating."

"I deceived you because the way you've always treated me, papa, the way you would have behaved about Mr. Grey, made it necessary if I wanted to know him; and I did want to know him, I did not intend you to prevent me."

"You did not intend me to prevent you! You preferred to compromise yourself with an utterly disreputable acquaintance?"

"Mr. Grey is not disreputable, and I am not in the habit of compromising myself."

"I don't know whether you are or not; I don't know now whether or not this is the first time you've done it. A young woman who secretly forms intimacies with a man her father considers unfit for her to know is compromising herself most deplorably. If I had no other evidence of the man's character and principles his leading you into such a course would be proof enough of them."

"I've already explained that it was you, papa, who drove me into the course."

"Indeed! And how, may I ask? By indulging you in

every possible manner? A nice return you make! — systematic hypocrisy and ingratitude, added to conduct fitting one of your servants!"

"I am not in the least ungrateful. You've been very kind to me during the last year; but I've also been very devoted to you. Till lately, I've given up everything for you, — my time and all my own desires and inclinations. I've done it willingly. I'm not ungrateful because I'm unwilling to remain a slave to your prejudices. As a human being I have rights you're bound to respect though you are my father; and you've disregarded them all my life. When the time came that you'd have interfered with my best good and happiness, and I realized it, I took my rights. Perhaps I've not always done it in the best way; but I had much to learn, and I did it in the only way I had the courage to do it then."

An unreasonable and despotic parent is not likely to see the logic and justice of the child's rebellious self-assertion, is not apt to trace the revolution back to its legitimate cause, — his own hearth-stone omnipotence, stupidly exacting unquestioning submission.

"I'll interfere with you to some purpose. In my own house, to my very face you have the audacity to stand up and defy me! We'll see who is master in my own family. Now you will tell me from beginning to end what your connection with this man has been, what it is at present. Do you know that the infamous villain has dared oppose himself to me — to *me*? Do you know that?"

"I've told you that Mr. Grey is neither infamous nor a villain."

"Answer me, do you know it? I've asked the question once."

"You asked it last summer too, and I lied to you. I do know it, and I knew it then. I lied to you through that whole scene because I was *afraid* to do anything else."

He uttered an exclamation of impotent rage. How was such a daughter to be dealt with, — a daughter who plainly did not mean to be intimidated again?

"Have you absolutely no shame, absolutely no sense of right? You lied to me, and admit it without a blush?"

"I was wrong; but it was more your fault than mine. Most girls would lie to you now. You are talking to me as you'd have no right to talk even if I were a child, and I am a woman. You would cow most girls; but I'm no longer afraid of you, papa."

The blood was hot in his face; his veins were swollen and dark. For the second time in his life his supreme autocracy had met more than its match, — first in the man his daughter was upholding, and now in that daughter herself. One had scoffed at, the other was defying him.

"Then I'll make you afraid of me. If affection is thrown away on you, perhaps harshness won't be. I'll make you understand my authority; I'll make you learn a daughter's duty and obedience if I have to keep you on bread and water to do it."

Vida smiled faintly, ironically.

No matter how thick the covering varnish, the brute instincts, once let loose, bring the naturally brute character dangerously near the animal level. Conventional training, however, generally remains something of a restraint. Radcliffe realized that he was losing grip of himself. And an uncomfortable thought flashed upon him. How much did Vida know of his experience with Winfred Grey?

"What has the man told you of his — of my — reason for hate — for wishing to protect my family from him?"

"Mr. Grey is a gentleman; he's told me nothing except that you bitterly dislike him."

Radcliffe breathed again. "And you believe him the persecuted victim, and me, your father, the villain?"

The blood mounted to his face hotter than ever.

"I do not believe he has done any wrong."

"And that I have?"

She did not answer.

"And that I have?" he repeated, seizing her by the wrist and pulling her to him. She did not flinch for one second.

"I'd rather not answer that question."

He flung her hand from him. She stood with arms hanging straight beside her, and head a little raised, her breath coming quicker, her eyes gathering a glow of fire. She still spoke quietly.

"I've not been a very good daughter till the last year; I've never amounted to much in any way; but I've begun to try and make something of myself. I've done my duty to you as well as I could. I've shown you as much respect — as a daughter ought. I tell you now perfectly calmly that I will no longer put up with this kind of treatment. I'm going to use my own judgment in following out my life; I'm not going to be restrained and controlled as if I were an infant or a fool. I'm nearly twenty-five years old. If you choose to recognize me as a full-grown, intelligent being, not a mere creature to obey you blindly, I will always ask your advice, and try to consider your wishes so far as I am able. If you will not, the time has come when I must assert myself, and let you know I'm not a puppet to do and feel and think as I'm ordered."

"Then go to this lover of yours, — I suppose he is your lover, — and do as he orders. If you're so dead to all regard for your birth and position, marry him, sink to the level of a theatrical tramp and convicted thief, if that's your taste. You need n't be afraid, he'll be willing enough; but he won't make what he's after, — not a dollar of my money, if you're starving, not a grain of mercy, if you get on your knees and beg for it. I'll follow him up till I've ruined him."

Vida quivered under the coarse invective.

"You'll make me forget you're my father," she said, in a voice dry and tense from her endeavor to control it. "I should be Winfred Grey's wife to-day; I should have been his wife a year ago if he had n't refused to let me share the trouble you've brought on him."

"I've brought on him, — I! Because I've protected a poor, friendless creature against his rascality! If ever you repeat that —"

"I'm sorry you force me to speak in a way I'd rather not. You're aiming to make Mr. Grey suffer for a crime which you *know* perfectly well he has not committed. You're not doing it to protect any friendless creature, but to revenge yourself on one of the greatest and truest men that ever lived. I don't know why you do it; but I know it's so. Because you are my father, I—I'm trying to keep from—from saying what I should say if—you were any one else."

Her face was flushed, her eyes were blazing with an indignation which she was striving to hold in check. Her courage, her passion, the superb strength and impressiveness of her attitude made the father quail before the child. The human relationship for the moment was subordinate to spiritual fact. It was Truth confronting Falsity. But the filial instinct asserted itself, and Vida recoiled from the unnatural mastery of her own father.

"I've been driven to say what I did n't intend to, papa. I can't—take it back; but I'll try and go on doing my duty as I've tried ever since you've needed me. I *have* done my best; I'll do it still if you'll let me."

"Do your duty! You'll try if I let you! If I let you! I never want to have anything to do with you as long as you live. I can't put you in the street; I've got to keep you in my house; but don't speak to me, don't come near me. You'll get your deserts as surely as this scoundrel; and he's being paid better than I ever hoped he'd be. He's going blind, blind! and I'll make him a pauper."

She started back with a cry. "Blind!" The word fell from her lips in a gasp of terror.

"Yes, thank God, blind. This miserable, low thief you've degraded yourself for, whose arms you'd throw yourself into—"

In the midst of her anguish and horror the woman in her rose outraged against the insult.

She cut him short in suppressed, trembling tones. "You are my father, God pity me! but you shall not insult me nor the man I love."

With one steady look straight into his eyes she turned, and left him glaring after her, reeling from the rush of blood that his fury sent throbbing to his brain. Her first impulse was to leave the house and the place then and there, just as she was. But her father intended to take the next train. She must wait for the one after. Her whole nature was in a storm of passionate anger and racked by passionate fear and grief for Winfred, the man whose love, strong and real as it was, had not been great enough to match the greatness, and rise to the height of hers, pre-eminent above all lesser motives and considerations. Never again would she hear him vilified; never again would she herself suffer the affront of her father's gross abuse and threats. She was no longer the helpless creature who had offered herself to a man she did not love to escape a home that seemed unendurable. She was free as air, had the means of livelihood within her own brain, at the point of a pen that had earned market value already. She was mistress of the situation. Where she would go, what she would do was not yet considered; to get away was her all-embracing idea, to get away at once.

By the time her father had left the house, her preparations were all made, and she went downstairs to look for her aunt, but Miss Radcliffe had gone out. She found Clara, and told her that she was going away, but did not know for how long, and to say to Aunt Georgiana that she would write in a few days.

"Who's invited you?" asked Clara. "They must have done it awfully sudden."

"It is rather sudden," said Vida. "I'm going to Mrs. Van Cortlandt's first." The idea came with the necessity for giving Clara some explanation.

She sent an order to have a trunk taken to the station, and the wagon brought around for herself. Clara ran off to some neighbor's house. Julian's college had opened, and he was boarding in town till the family returned; and Vida went out from her home without a parting smile or tear from a single being to whom the ties of blood and custom had united her.

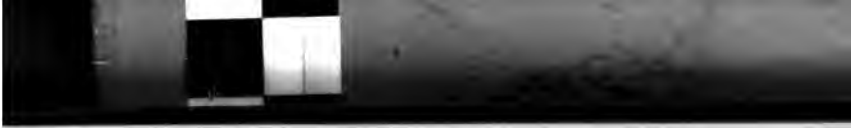
The union was very slight ; the bonds she broke had been galling ; the life she left trivial and false ; but at the final moment the snapping asunder of all natural relations sent a sharp pang through her heart, and made her lip tremble a little, and her eyes grow moist.

The house was not in the least endeared to her, — a hired cottage where she had passed a cheerless summer ; but looking back at it as she drove away, a forlorn sense of loneliness swept over her. She had voluntarily cast herself adrift on the great tide of a world where she must sink or swim according to her own strength or weakness, her own power of endurance, — a girl discarding the restraint counted seemly for girls to be under ! She was defying the traditions in which she had been reared, the conservatism her order held to as a second religion, the criticism of friend and foe, was giving up luxury, abdicating social station, throwing away social prestige, to become a toiler for her daily bread, a Bohemian, a renegade from her class, and a traitor to its instincts of decorum. The interview with her father came vividly before her mind, and a flush of anger burned again in her cheeks. She drew her head up with the old haughty defiance. She was ready to face a universe.

Arrived in the city, she left her trunk at the station, and went directly to Mrs. Van Cortlandt's. There was undeniable comfort at thought of the shelter to be found in her friend's house and presence.

"Mrs. Van Cortlandt went to Washington yesterday, Miss," said the butler, who opened the door. "She won't be home for a week."

The man's glibness was inhuman. She went down the steps, for the moment almost unnerved. There was not another person in the whole town to whom she felt she could turn in this hour of audacious revolt. Cousin Tom was still away, and going to Mrs. Dinsmore's would be forcing herself upon Winfred. "And why not ?" the passionate thought arose. "He's ill, miserable, threatened with a calamity worse to him than



death ; he needs me, and I belong there." But his avoidance had been too persistent for such a step to be possible. There was a way, however, in which she might, in which she would make one more appeal for herself and him, seconded and upheld by other influences, — his mother and sister's. She would go to Meadbrook and beg their help. Surely, surely this time she could make him understand. It seemed as if her previous effort must have been very weak and inadequate, or how could he have resisted the truth she spoke ?

It was too late to start that afternoon ; she would have to wait till the next morning. She thought of passing the night at the Home Settlement, but knew the house was already crowded to its uttermost capacity, so she went to a hotel instead, — the Everett House, because it was quiet, and off the line of fashionable travel. She had her dinner served in her room that evening, as much to avoid being stared at as being recognized by any person who might chance to know her.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A FULL-BLOODED gentleman cannot always get into a towering rage without paying tribute in physical ailment for his temper's excess. When his daughter left him, Radcliffe clutched at a chair to keep from falling. The vertigo which had seized him lasted only a moment, but he did not feel like himself all day, which was inopportune, for he particularly needed his wits and energies in prime condition.

Till recently no one had the remotest idea how close to the perilous margin of financial collapse the merchant prince, Radcliffe, had been sailing. Lately faint rumors of his instability had begun to flutter abroad like soft-winged creatures of darkness, bats, owls, and other ill-omened portents of misfortune. He had entered into some tremendous and, in truth, questionable speculations, competing with certain men it would have been much wiser to combine with. But this would have meant taking a subordinate part, — a thing the Radcliffe autocracy could not and would not brook. He felt strong enough to beat his opponents, and had, indeed, come out thus far with flying colors. The contest had been hot at the time of Winfred's trial; and he had scored a distinct success, so distinct as now to feel perfectly secure. The game was his. But in masterly secrecy one of his rivals was preparing a *coup de force* which, if successfully put through, would at this eleventh hour turn the tables, and leave Radcliffe a much crippled financier. The ripening of the scheme was coincident with Radcliffe's rage-engendered indisposition, and the critical hour found him ill able to deal with it. He felt heavy, nerveless, his mind clogged, his head aching. He put mind and body under the lash to face the situation. The battle lasted all day. Late in the afternoon Defeat,

Disaster, Ruin, made intrusive entrance into one of the most magnificent private offices in the city, and claimed their latest victim. Intangible and awful spectres they, whose vocation it is to fill morgues, madhouses, and graves, — offspring of lying, stealing, hating, of every species and variety of evil-speaking and evil-doing, and yet, withal, respecters and avengers of down-trodden virtue! They were heralded by a pale, trembling wretch who crept in to tell his chief they were at the door. Then they glided up to Radcliffe, and one took him by the throat, and he felt suffocating, and one seized his heart, and pressed it between hard fingers till the blood gushed from it through the strained arteries up to the brain that had been so dull and sodden all day. Then there was a snap inside the brain, a spasm of the features, a gurgle in the tight-held throat, and Gordon Radcliffe lurched forward, a dead man from crown to foot down the whole right side of his body.

They took him to a hospital, telegraphed for his sister, hunted up his son, and left him to the ministration of a grave and ominous-looking medical fraternity. Vida, rising late after a disturbed night, heard nothing of it all. She ate a hurried breakfast, and just managed to catch the eleven o'clock train for Boston.

It was not a bright day, — one of those gray November times when, though no rain is in the air, the sky is shut off by a great dun mantle of cloud that makes the earth sombre and the atmosphere chill. The train boy came through the car calling the morning papers. He looked at her; but she shook her head. Her thought furnished occupation enough; she did not care to read. But glancing up after the boy had gone, she wondered a little what the two middle-aged men diagonally opposite her found so exciting in the "Heralds" which they had bought. She heard the words "failure," "apoplexy," uttered in an exclamatory voice, then returned to her reflections, gazing out at the brown fields the train was speeding past, at the lines of gray fence, the bits of leafless woodland, the houses, the barns, the flashes of gray water in ponds and streams, the curves and

stretches of dull gray roads. Her mind naturally reverted to the scene with her father. Had she been altogether blameless in the matter? Had she not provoked where she might have conciliated, been bitter where she might have been persuasive? She thought of her long time of service to him, of the tenderness for him which it had created in her heart, and the affection it had won from his, hardened, self-encrusted though that organ were. She recalled her resolutions of patience and love; the ideals set herself; the spirit of holiness that had whispered its inspiration and its comfort in her soul. Like the veriest traitor she had betrayed them all. A humiliating shame stung her which, nevertheless, did not lead to foolish condemnation of the course she had taken, but only of the method employed. The time had come when mind and soul imperiously demanded full liberty of exercise. She had borne with her surroundings while conscience had ordered it. But another phase of life had dawned for her; her sphere of action now lay without, not within, her home. Winfred, not her father, was now her primal duty. How infinitely she loved him, in a deep, voiceless way which her first feeling for him, true and holy though it were, had but dimly foreshadowed! Her early love had been a sweet, precious blossom of undeveloped girlhood; it had grown in fervor and beauty till, like a great forest elm, it stood strong, enduring, stretching arms earthward to reach and hold him, and heavenward to win God's blessings for him. From the most hidden depths of her spirit her whole nature poured forth a love so pure, so mighty, she herself wondered that her soul could nurture so divine a thing. All thoughts merged in thought of him, where mingled fear and hope, pity and prayer, and, above all else, aspiration and faith for him, whatever his future, whether of sorrow or of joy.

On reaching Boston she had to wait some time before her train started for Huxton. The train was a slow one, and she would not reach her destination till after nine o'clock. She wondered how she would get to the farm, vehicles not being easily procurable at such hours in the small town. She peered

through the dark at the innumerable stations where the train stopped. It seemed an endless journey before they reached Huxton ; but at last came the conductor's inarticulate shout which, in his vocabulary, stood for the name of the place. One passenger besides herself got out, a man from another car. When he passed under the faint light of the station lamp, Vida recognized him as the local butcher, a genial soul, upon whose cows and sheep she and her family had chiefly subsisted while at Red Rock. She hailed him as a providential dispensation, and bartered with him for a conveyance to take her to Hill Top Farm.

Now that the decisive moment was so near, she felt nervous, and half-frightened at the boldness of her action. She had plenty of leisure to reflect upon it before reaching Meadbrook, as her driver proved to be an apparently tongueless youth, wholly unresponsive to amicable efforts of converse. She wished that she had been less impetuous, and had planned to arrive in the day-time rather than at this unseemly hour, — half-past nine at night. And why had she not sent word she was coming? Her arrival would certainly create a sensation.

"Whoa — ah!" said the boy, and he drew up at the gate of the farm with a jerk. Vida summoned all her courage to the front, and walked up the path, groping her way uncertainly through the dark. The silence which reigns at night about a country house was unbroken by the slightest sound. The dreariness of the black November gloom made the place seem forlorn. Some one was still up, for a light was shining through the sitting-room windows, — a dim light as from a fire or a lamp turned low. She went towards it, meaning to knock at the sitting-room door opening off the veranda. Looking first through the closed shutters, she saw no one in the part of the room visible to her. She knocked timidly ; but no one answered, again, and still no reply. Then she tried the door, and finding it unfastened, walked in. The room was empty. The light she had seen came from a log-fire burning brightly on the hearth, and sending weird, flickering gleams over the walls, and casting wavering shadows about the floor. She closed the door behind her, and while standing un-

certain what to do, the other door at the far end of the room opened slowly. With a dark bandage tied over his eyes, his head thrown back to see what little he could from under the bandage, Winfred entered the room, guiding himself more by help of his outstretched hands than by the limited vision which he could use.

Vida was struck dumb and motionless; the surprise of finding him here (possibility of such a thing had never crossed her mind), the pathos of the great, strong man's helplessness paralyzed for a second all power of thought or action. He advanced directly towards her. She did not know what to do. She was afraid to startle him by sudden revelation of her presence; and yet how could it be helped? She moved a little to attract his attention.

"Who's that? You, Kate? I thought you'd gone upstairs. Who is it? Why don't you answer?"

"Winfred, Winfred," she said, her voice choking, "it's I, Vida."

He started back, and, putting his hands up, tore the bandage from his eyes.

"Vida!" His voice trembled, broke almost into a sob. With a cry of contending joy and anguish, she threw her arms about his neck as he strained her to him, and kissed her with the hungry passion which he had starved so long and pitilessly.

He held her from him, and looked at her worshippingly, satiating himself with every detail of her radiant, softened beauty. For a month his eyes had not been uncovered save for treatment, and his mad use of them might do harm beyond possible repair. He was heedless of the danger, reckless of the suffering, he would have to endure in payment of his rashness. He touched her wonderingly, reverently, — touched her dress, her hands, her hair. He took her face between his hands, and kissed her eyes and her sweet mouth with a great passion subdued by adoration. And she, looking up at him, put her hands over his pain-racked eyes, and felt the hot tears trickling from her own as she laid her face against his breast. He took her hands away, and kissed them, raised her head and saw the tears on her cheeks.

"No, no," he murmured, drawing her close to him, "you must not cry, you must not."

"Thank God, I've come to you," she whispered.

"How has it happened? What does it mean, little girl?"

"I've much to say to you, dear; but let me put on the bandage again; you must — let me do it."

"Oh!" It was half a groan, half a refusal. "It's a year, twenty years, a life-time, since I've looked on your face, and you want to blind me again! How beautiful you are!" He passed his hand over her hair, and down her soft cheek. "Tell me now — everything; while I can watch your face, before I'm sent back to that hideous night."

"I must send you now, and you'll go for me."

"Not yet, not yet. Ten minutes, five, give me just one."

"Every moment you stand looking so is torment to me; you may be doing what you can't undo. Will you make my coming a misery?"

"Well — do as you wish, little girl."

He picked the bandage from the floor, and handed it to her. She sat down, and he knelt at her feet while she tied it in place; then he laid his head on her knee, realizing his own imprudence as the horrible pain throbbed fiercely in his strained eyeballs. For a moment he did not speak, fearful of betraying his suffering. After a while the pain grew less acute. He felt for a bench, and drew it towards him. Seating himself upon it, he took her hand and clasped it close.

"Now tell me," he said.

The firelight glimmered ruddier and softer. One pitch-veined log broke into a low singing monotone as the flames caught it where the rich sap oozed out. A great sadness was in Vida's face as she looked down at the man she had come to cherish in his suffering and misfortune, looked at him sitting with the eyes that burned so passionately for her bound and darkened. She laid her hand softly on his head.

"I shall never, never leave you again. If you say I must, I shall not heed you; if you leave me, I shall follow you."

He made no answer, but lifted the hand he held, and pressed it to his cheek. She felt his own hand tremble.

"I did n't know you were here; I came to ask your mother and sister to help me see you and — and convince you."

"Do you know —" He hurt her hand, he unconsciously crushed it so tight. "Do you know — it — the case has gone against me?"

"It's because I know it that I'm here."

"Do you know the probability is I shall be blind for life?"

"Oh!" She threw her arms about him, and drew him to her.

"Do you understand, little sweetheart, I sha'n't be able to — to — I may be a miserable, helpless log, unable to earn another dollar to buy myself a loaf of bread, and unable to give the lie to that damnable accusation."

"I'll be your fingers and eyes; you can dictate to me."

"I've tried it, but it's no good. My mind won't half work that way. I must feel the pen in my own hands."

There was a long silence, while the log on the hearth sang cheerily.

She spoke first. "Do *you* know," she asked, "I've been successful; I've had more stories published?"

"Do I know you live and I love you? Is there anything I can know about you that I don't? They're locked in a drawer with the letters and with the rose you gave me that night. They are fine, very fine. I was a true prophet, and I'm proud of my authoress. I did the world one good office when I discovered her."

She was too weighted with the seriousness of the case to banter about it.

"I'm writing a novel. The 'Metropolitan Magazine' has taken it, and I'll be splendidly paid. I can earn a great deal now. What difference does it make where the money comes from? There's enough for both of us."

He started, stung as with a lash. "Great God, what are

you saying!" He spoke harshly. "*I live on your labor ; let you work to — to keep me, — a useless, helpless wreck ! It would be an insult from any one but you.*" He put up his hands to free himself again of the bandage. It was unbearable in his excitement. She seized his hand, and pled with him to refrain. He relaxed the attempt to liberate himself from her, and yielded mutely to the tender words she poured out to him. Then : —

"I've much to tell you," she said. "I'll commence way back at the beginning."

She started from the time he had sent her from him, told him of her longing for him, her wretchedness without him, told of her efforts to do right, of her prayers for his happiness and good. Each word argued her cause indirectly but pathetically. He was very quiet, never speaking, hardly moving save to tighten his hold on her hand when she spoke of her suffering. She came to the weeks following the trial, her suspense, her sense of desperation and hopelessness, then the last and culminating scene that had made her homeless.

"And I came where I belong — to you," she said. "Winfred, Winfred, you've robbed us both of much happiness ; you've tortured yourself and tortured me. I won't speak for you ; it would n't move you. I'll speak for myself. I can't force you to marry me ; I would if I could. If you choose, you can turn me off as you did before ; you can leave me a girl without the protection of a home or a human being to love and care for her, alone to bear the comments and criticism of the world, which will never understand my position, and will always be suspicious of a young woman who will not or cannot live in her own father's house."

"It is only I who stand in your way. Promise him you'll have nothing more to do with me, and you can go back."

"And after all I've told you, you'd have me go back?"

He was silent.

"It is not you who stand in the way ; it's my own mind and soul. I shall never go back whether you keep me with you

or not ; that is settled forever. It will be very hard for you to drive me from you. I'll ask your mother to let me stay here as long as you do ; and I think she will. When you go, I'll go after you. Because I know you love me, I shall not have one second's shame in following you over the world to make you listen to me."

"How can you love me so much?" he asked, awed and humbled by devotion so complete, so divine. "I'm no more worthy of it than a dumb brute."

"Only God knows how much I love you ; but it is not blindly now. You won't be worthy of it, — for it's a God-given thing, Winfred, — if you undervalue it again, if you make it second to a false shame and a false pride. Where people love perfectly, the world's standard of obligations does n't hold. There's a higher standard, which, if circumstances compel it, will let the man accept all he'd naturally give instead. You are the love of my life, as I am of yours. By that higher standard you may not leave me to an empty, starved existence, even if you're willing to face it yourself. You can't deceive yourself with the thought that such an existence would be for my good. You know that life together, in any circumstances, is the only one that can be *best* for either of us, that can make you a complete man and me a complete woman, that can bring us both happiness in spite of everything that may be sad and hard. Oh, my darling, can't you see it ; don't you know I'm speaking God's truth, God who made us fellow souls and mates whom you can wilfully torture if you choose, but can never, never divorce? Don't you know it?"

"Yes." The assent was almost inaudible, he spoke so low.

"You did n't know me at first, dear ; but I knew you. I loved you from the first hour I met you — that day in the Park. I was n't my real self then, nor for a long time after. As soon as I was, you knew me too and loved me."

"And my love is to bring you disgrace and poverty?"

"I don't call it so."

"You are to give all, and I — the man — *nothing!* Vida, Vida, Vida, how can I, how can I?"

"If you love enough you can."

"Think what you're used to! I could have taken care of you once as you should be taken care of —"

"The things you suppose I need, I don't value in the least. I've had luxury and gayety all my life; I don't want them, I want to be rid of them; they smother me, and I want to be free."

He put his arms closer about her, and drew her nearer to him.

"Now we'll be practical," she said, smiling up at him; "we'll talk cold dollars and cents. For a while, you won't earn anything; because you've got to take care of yourself and get well — you will get well, don't say you won't, don't." She put her hand over his mouth to stop his protest. "Till then, besides what I'll make, we've a great deal — you forget. There are the royalties on all your books, and on 'A Social Test,' and I dare say you've some stocks or bonds somewhere."

"They may all go for costs and damages."

"Well, the royalties?"

"Yes, there are the royalties."

"So you talked nonsense when you said you've nothing, — just foolish, perverse nonsense. The royalties on the play alone are enormous. I know they are, Cousin Tom told me."

"The case is to be taken up to the next court; I can't let it rest where it is, and I must appeal it again if I lose it again. I must carry it through to the end. It may take a great deal of money."

"And we'll need very little. Oh, Winfred, I wonder if any girl in all this world ever begged a man to marry her as I've begged you; and I have n't even the grace to be ashamed of it." The sadness in her tone belied the lightness of her words. He had risen and seated himself on the arm of her chair. She laid her head on his breast. "I'm tired, so tired, Winfred; the suffering and the strain have been so long.

I want to rest, to rest the only way I can — with you. Will you let me?"

Still one moment longer he hesitated. His pride was fighting a death-struggle, and victory was not easily won.

"Is it so hard to make me happy? Suppose it were you asking me." She spoke sadly, wearily.

"You've made a sorry choice, little girl; but — you shall have your will."

The moment was too solemn and too glad for words. She rose, and stooping over him where he sat, bent his head back and kissed him on the lips, the first time she had ever done it.

"From this night, God helping me, I shall be a different and a better man. If I get well, I'll make you a queen, my Vida, if I don't — pray for me, help me."

Then in the firelight, talking, and planning, and dreaming, facing the worst and hoping the best, learning the new, holy rapture of a relation which makes love's claims sweet rights, learning the deep joy of mutual aims and aspirations, of acknowledged oneness in life-purpose and life-interest, — in the firelight they sat, and the gray clouds that had hung over the earth all day rose slowly, scattered by the breath of a fresh breeze that sprang up, and the stars shone, dimly first through the dispersing mists, then brilliantly in the clear, dry night. They forgot time, or were indifferent to it. Just before the tall clock in the corner struck one, a soft tread sounded on the stairs, and then along the hall.

"It's mother," said Winfred.

She opened the door and came in. "Winfred, whatever are you doing up so late? You know you ought to be in bed. When I left you down here, you said you'd be up before ten."

"And so I should have been, but I've had a visitor who kept me."

"I heard a wagon drive up; and then I heard you talking. Who is it, who's with you?"

"My wife," and he laid Vida's hand in hers.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE afternoon was clear but disagreeable. A high wind swept through the city from the northeast. The wayfarer buttoned tight his coat, and turned up his collar, shivering in the cutting blast. It went howling savagely over the house-tops, among the chimneys, loosened insecure shutters, and rattled ill-fitting window-sashes. Few who could remain indoors cared to be abroad in the clutches of the fiercely sportive gale.

Margaret stood back of her curtains, just parting them enough to look out while herself remaining unseen by any one glancing up. A carriage waited before the door. In a moment several figures emerged from the house onto the front steps beneath her window. She moved forward a little and peered at the group with strained intensity. Gerard, leaning on Ethel and Harry's arms, slowly descended the steps, and crossed the sidewalk to the carriage. He walked with apparent effort, and seemed indifferent to or unconscious of the persons standing in the doorway to see him off. He entered the carriage without glancing back. Harry had to help him in, then Ethel followed, and a middle-aged lady, a cousin of Mrs. Wendell's who was going with them. Harry intended to accompany the party, and see them settled on the Virginia plantation where it was decided they should pass the winter. The plan had been determined upon, under medical advice, as essential to Gerard's recovery, of which there was every hope with proper conditions assured. Chief among these were quiet, happy surroundings and Ethel's companionship. After his mind became clear enough to understand his position, freedom from anxiety would be absolutely needful, at least until his health was fully re-established. What this last necessity involved Margaret realized distinctly, had

realized from the moment Ethel suggested its importance. Since then her mother and father had also spoken about a divorce as the only solution of the question, urging her consent, not alone for Gerard's sake, but for Ethel's, whose reputation was at stake.

From a very early period in her life Margaret's moral and religious views had always been clearly defined, and had constituted a strict code by which she measured right and wrong, and upon which she based her principles. Loyalty to principles had ever been one of her most marked characteristics. For the sins and shortcomings of her fellowmen she had much charity, but held herself to a close observance of her narrowest tenets. She possessed, in a marked degree, the tenacity of a conscientious mind, intelligent, but limited by lack of breadth and the instinct of bold inquiry. Hitherto her code had served her needs perfectly. She had never faced any situation where, to her perception, its observance clashed with her own or any one's else good. The code being founded on doctrinal verities, and therefore being true, could not in any circumstances clash with good. If it seemed to, it was because of mortal inability always to recognize good under a guise of apparent ill. Because of the awfulness of a situation suddenly thrust upon her, what right had she to say: Here at last the code fails; here at last it is proved defective, though in every other problem given me to solve, I found it just, a trusty guide leading unerringly in ways of righteousness? God's ordinances set aside or a fellow-being's reason sacrificed, — there was the choice, as she beheld it, with no right of hesitation to one walking the hard path of duty. Conformity to divine will was her only course; for which she fortified herself by the thought that it could never be at variance with man's real good, however circumstances seemed to falsify the belief. It did not occur to her that human conception of divine will might be at wide variance with every species of good. She suffered very much, suffered doubly, for the crushing blow dealt her own heart, and for the refusal with which she felt compelled to answer all entreaties. Her mother, father, her whole family, sided against her, leagued to force her

to deny the vows she had taken, and do violence to a venerated sacrament. And she refused, sadly feeling that sympathy for her was gradually being lost in condemnation of her action. To yield would have been so infinitely easier, to yield and gain peace, the last craving desire of her weary spirit. In solitude she battled with the temptation as no one ever knew or imagined. Irrespective of the wisdom or folly, the right or wrong of her course Margaret showed the fortitude of a hero, and the endurance of a martyr, — surely to be counted her for grace at the great summing up of life, even if the rock of her convictions proved a quicksand of error.

The carriage-door closed with a sharp slam, the carriage-wheels rattled noisily down the street. Margaret stood pale, as motionless as a dead woman, watching the vehicle till it turned the corner, bearing out of her life forever the man whose name had become hers. How mistakenly, but how pathetically, he had sacrificed himself, thinking to leave her unawakened in her fool's paradise, — ready to give his very life to his ideal of honor and duty! And in the end what a failure it had all been! Not because the flesh rebelled, but because it was too finely wrought to sustain the effort demanded by the spirit. And Ethel, hiding her suffering in her heart, letting no sign escape till taken when off her guard! The first cry of Margaret's own heart had been one of reproach; but she saw clearer now, and no longer blamed either the man or the woman. They had deceived her; but the motive was clean and unselfish. Yet what folly, — what pitiable, insane folly! As if such deception can ever bear the test of time and of unforeseen emergencies! A feeling came to her that another woman could not have been blinded so long, would have been quicker than she to understand certain signs, now, in the light of after-knowledge, read plainly enough. She recalled too that occasional uneasy sense of incompleteness in her relation to Gerard, a half consciousness of not being in touch with certain phases of his character, not apprehending certain, to her, vague requirements of his nature. Intuition had been wanting here; but instinct now told her that

in Ethel he would find no such lack as in herself. The thought was bitter. What was missing in her that Ethel possessed? She loved this man with her whole soul; why had she not been able to hold his love? She began to question whether in truth it had ever really been hers. She had before this analyzed her sister's temperament, and dwelt upon its more passionate, impressionable qualities, — results, not causes, of the fundamental difference between the two women. Margaret's own nature prevented her from fathoming, or even suspecting, the true character of the difference, that of degree in the element of sex, — negative in one; as pure and holy, but alive and vital in the other. Margaret's deficiency itself kept her from grasping the conclusive fact that in the man and in the woman who are magnetic forces among their kind, powers in the world, doers and achievers, the mysterious element of sex is invariably a positive, active, not a dead, negative thing.

As the carriage passed out of sight, she turned slowly back into the room; the curtains dropped from her hands, and she stood half numbed, only sensible of a crushing weight pressing down upon her, and to continue pressing down endlessly. In communion with God and strictest self-examination, how she had prepared herself for the sacred office of wife! A wife she was in the eyes of the law, and a wife in the eyes of Heaven, with a life-claim upon this fellow-being which no human decree could annul; this she never for a moment doubted. And yet her last sight of her husband had been secret, stolen, as though it were something to which she had no smallest right. For days she had not been allowed to enter Gerard's room. It would be risking too much, they said. Some troubled recollection might be aroused in his mind, some disturbance produced; so she had let him go without one look into his eyes, one touch of his hand to ease the hunger for some sign of lingering tenderness. And this was the beginning of their wedlock! What was to be the end? Its shadow, looming black out of the future, was too dread for thought to face. Not the darkness of her own life appalled her, but the terrible possibility hanging over his. Her

hands alone could dispel it, and those hands were fettered. Suppose she actually drove Ethel to the step which she had declared herself ready to take! — that unnamable sin not to be justified by any circumstances, the most wretched, the most tragic! It was a terrible thing to be the instigator, however innocent, of another's crime, of her own sister's. She felt dazed, paralyzed by the wrack of heart and torment of mind. A low moan escaped her, and then at last the strained nerves gave way; and, falling on her knees, in the awful loneliness of her soul, she cried to God for support, if it might be for deliverance, for death, the only deliverance of which she could conceive. Yes, if in mercy she might die and free the man so close bound to her for his own hopeless ill, — die, and be at rest from the pleadings and the censure of all those most loved and honored, and most grieved, at rest from the torture of a situation which she could not in conscience alter. She prayed as she had never in all her devout life prayed before. The calm of exhaustion followed, but not the calm of one who has seen God. The childlike, unquestioning peace Ethel found in the Salvation Army hall, Margaret, with all her honest piety, had not yet earned, — the unfailing, law-ruled compensation of simple, childlike self-surrender. Margaret, not wilfully, but unconsciously, waited for the Almighty to adopt her views and her means, — not an attitude that opens the soul for illumination or sanctification.

— She arose from her knees, and, the paroxysm of grief past, recollection of immediate duties returned to her mind. Among the “pressing cases” under her charge was an unfortunate consumptive woman with a crippled husband laid up in the hospital, and three or four half-clad, half-starved children. The woman needed medicine, and the whole family food. What were personal troubles in the face of this practical want? Too much time had been wasted already in selfish abandon to grief. Margaret quickly dressed for the street, and hurried out to procure the things most necessary for her protégés’ use. A lassitude had come over her, and she would much rather have

stayed home. Her mind felt inert ; her body shrunk from contest with the cutting wind. Though never apt to take alarm at any physical disorder of her own, the thought forcibly suggested itself : Am I going to be ill ? With the idea recurred the wish for death. But if not allowed to solve contending difficulties so easily, what should she do with her life ? How could it best be ordered so as to make it least burdensome to herself and most useful to others ? Joining a sisterhood ? The desire had come to her before.

To reach the street where the unfortunate woman lived she had to walk a short distance after leaving the trolley car which carried her most of the way. Her mission of charity consumed half an hour or more ; and when she left the woman the early autumn dusk was gathering fast, and the street lamps were all alight. As she went on her way, the sense of weariness became more and more oppressive. An incident occurred which showed how strong, nevertheless, remained the natural human impulse of self-preservation. She was crossing a crowded thoroughfare, when a cab, recklessly driven, turned the corner sharply as a car approached from the opposite direction. Margaret was between the two, and had no time either to advance or retreat. Several people shouted a useless warning ; the motorman put on the brakes, but too late to be availing. Margaret drew a little nearer the car, instinctively measuring the space between the vehicles. They both whirled past, and she stood unharmed, the wheels of the cab having left a mark of dust along her skirt.

Faint and dizzy from the danger escaped, she asked herself why she had moved. It was her chance, perhaps the very answer to her prayer, and she had missed it. The death would have been horrible, but it would probably have been quick. The life-instinct was a strange thing, tenaciously holding sway in the very hour when her one desire was to lay life down. She was approaching a building where extensive repairs were being made. It was lit up by electric lights. Evidently the work pressed, and was to go on all night. A sign stood



before the house labelled with the word danger. Pieces of lath and brick were being thrown from the upper stories. Margaret turned to cross the street, when a man's sharp cry of alarm made her pause. A child, a poor, ragged little creature, had darted within the danger line from behind some hiding-place, and pounced eagerly upon a pile of wood, filled with promise of warmth for the cold tenement-room from which she came. The girl's sudden appearance, the cry, Margaret's perception of the child's peril, and the loosening from above of a heavy piece of timber, all followed each other so quickly as to be almost simultaneous in their time of occurrence. Springing forward, Margaret pushed the child aside ; the timber fell with a great, deafening crash ; and Margaret lay quite still, never feeling the blow, probably, in the short flash of her expiring earth-life, not knowing what had given her release.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HIGH up among the Shawangunk Mountains lies a lake, clear as the finest-spun glass, cool, deep, fathoms deep in parts, with a golden bed of powdered sand. The lake is a good hour's drive up steep roads from the village below, where the sleepy train of a little branch track from the Erie Railroad makes pause before sauntering on to the next station. Grassy banks, with rocks interspersed, lie along the lake. Trees of primeval age and majesty thrust twisted roots among the rocks, and distend great arms, whose every leaf is waveringly duplicated in the fluid mirror beneath. On one side of the lake, bits of open meadow-land allow glimpses of surrounding summits and, at certain points, a panoramic view of the valley, of lower peaks, and distant misty mountain-ranges. On the other side, thick woods stretch back from the shore for miles and miles, traversed only by two or three rough roads, and a few foot-paths.

But one house is visible along the mile-and-a-half length of the lake. It stands at the upper end, on the very edge of the water, where the chief inlet stream rushes with ceaseless song from out a tangled glen down a bed of rock and smooth-worn stones, to pour its exhaustless flood into the basin it has hurried to find. Back a mile or more, in a protected nook of the mountains, lies a hamlet. Its inhabitants are God-fearing, peace-loving, industrious children of the fields and heights, boasting a school, two churches, and a postmaster.

The house is a queer house, low and rambling, built in odd wings and extensions of different levels, with a piazza at one end, from which the eye can sweep over a wide vista of vales, hills, and mountains. Nobody had lived in the place for fifteen years, — since its originator died and was buried, leaving it to heirs

who, in their turn, left it to the spiders, at the mercy of the elements. Years before, Winfred had stumbled across it while on a walking tour with Gerard, and had looked at it then with envious eyes; but its purchase had seemed rather absurd for a bachelor, who would have been much inconvenienced if obliged to inhabit his domain. Then occurred those circumstances which removed the objection of absurdity; and, Vida being as much fascinated with the place as Winfred himself, he made a bid for it, which was accepted with alacrity. Some time was taken up preparing the abode for human habitation; then its new tenants moved in with an air of settling for life. With the exception of short periods of absence in town, it had been their home for more than a year, since about six months after their marriage.

The June day was drawing to a close. The last tinge of a soft pink sunset was fading slowly away above the mountain-tops across the valley. It was one of those intensely quiet evenings; all nature was voiceless, motionless. The evening mail had been distributed, and the four persons seated on the piazza were busy with the perusal of their respective missives. Vida had drawn apart from the others, and sat holding an open letter in her hand, an answer to one written more than a year before. She had read the letter once, but began it a second time; not for any pleasure it afforded, but to try and grasp all its *unwritten* meanings and, if possible, find them less disagreeable than had appeared on first inspection, less suggestive of the writer's complete lack of kindness for and total estrangement from her correspondent.

MY DEAR VIDA, — We arrived in New York ten days ago, after a very nasty trip. We have come over only for a few weeks; and, as I probably shall not see you, I thought I would write instead. I have not answered your letter before, because I wished to do so as calmly and charitably as possible. I had to give myself time to look at your actions more indifferently than I could at first. Your marriage did not surprise me. I will

not express my opinion of it at length ; but I may at least say that you have done your family a great wrong in forming an alliance with a man pronounced guilty of such very dishonorable actions, and who, whether he is innocent or not (*I* try to accept your assertion that he is) bears all the stigma of guilt, and I suppose always will. You also owed it to us to consider the birth and connections of the man whose wife you became. But I have already told you my views upon this subject.

As regards your behavior to papa, of course you can never get over the self-reproach of having been one of the causes, — *the* chief cause, — of his illness, and perhaps of his ruin. You speak of your extreme regret that he will not allow you to see him, and do what you can to alleviate his troubles. But I really don't know what else you can possibly expect.

I suppose, even though you have cut yourself off so entirely from us all, you know the family's general situation. I, living so far away, have never realized it fully till now. Though prepared for it, I was dreadfully shocked on actually coming face to face with the disasters that have happened since I left home two years ago. Poor papa's condition almost overcame me, though Aunt Georgiana says he is no worse than usual, perhaps even a little better. His mind is perfectly clear (which under the circumstances is hardly a blessing); but his speech is so affected that he can only make himself understood by signs. The doctors have given up all hope of his ever walking again. It is superfluous to say that he is very unhappy. The discomfort and humiliation a man of his habits and standing must feel at being obliged to live in the poor, unfitting way he is reduced to — *in an apartment with but two servants* — are enough to crush him. When his physical condition is added to these troubles, his fate is a cruel and a wicked one. Perhaps you do not know that Clara has been sent to boarding-school ; because the poor child naturally cannot endure the mortification of meeting her friends in town. Aunt Georgiana's position is most trying ; but *she* is unable to escape it. I cannot understand why these dreadful misfortunes should have come to *our* family, when

other people never have anything happen to them at all. As to Julian's conduct, there is nothing to be said. The horrible woman he secretly married just before poor papa was stricken down has since left him and lived with two other men, one of them Frank Vaughn, who they say is leading a most disreputable life. Where Julian is, or how he is existing, none of us know or wish to know. *Some* of papa's children have certainly not been blessings to him. That our own flesh and blood should have brought such disgrace upon us is very hard to bear. My marriage alone, of which you were pleased to disapprove so highly, has saved me from being involved in the general downfall.

You may be sufficiently interested to know that I am perfectly satisfied and happy. August and I are entirely suited to each other, people of the world both of us, with common sense and no *bourgeois* sentimentalities. No husband and wife could possibly get along better. When people learn to marry rationally, instead of romantically, the world will be a much improved place. I entertain a great deal and as perfectly as I can desire. My position is in every respect most enviable. That yours is not equally so, is entirely your own fault. Aunt Elizabeth certainly did all *she* could for you.

I should be happy to see you while I am in America, but there are so many reasons which make a meeting undesirable that I think it better to defer it till some time when I come over again. In the mean while I shall always be pleased to hear from you, for I *cannot* forget that you are my sister.

Yours affectionately,

MABEL DE CHOISEUL.

Vida dropped the letter in her lap and brushed away the moisture that had gathered in her eyes. Mabel had never been noted for kindness or delicacy of feeling, but the heartless insult of her letter was something of which Vida could not have believed her capable. It showed a hardening and coarsening of her nature which surely ought to have been incompatible with the "elegant refinement" of the *Faubourg St. Germain*.

There was a rustle of skirts behind Vida, and a girl stepped to her side, a girl with a lithe, graceful motion and wonderful red-gold hair, — Ethel, just as she used to be, restored to her old brightness, though for the moment there was a disturbed look on her face. Vida turned as she heard her approach.

“What is it, dear?” asked Ethel, putting an arm around her neck. “I happened to see your expression as you read your letter. Something in it has troubled you.”

“I sha’n’t let it trouble me any more. Mabel has written and — Ah, Ethel, it is you who are my real sister, not Mabel.”

“No sister in the world could have been more devoted than you’ve been to me, Vida. I can never half thank you and Winfred with my lips; but you *know* both Gerard’s heart and mine.”

“*You* know there’s nothing to thank us for, that it’s been a delight having you here. Don’t we love Gerard, and don’t we love you? Tell me, — you got a bundle of papers this evening, — are there any more notices of the pictures?”

“A splendid one about Gerard’s, — a great long one.”

“Good! And about yours? Don’t be so improperly modest.”

“Well, there’s a nice one about mine, — a dear little ten-line one.”

“We’ve started you both on your right track, that duty at least is accomplished.”

“The year we’ve spent here has done more to make Gerard well and strong than three years in any other place would have done.”

“Thank God, he is well and strong! Thank God, you are both happy!”

“Poor Margaret!” said Ethel. “It was cruel that she had to suffer so, and then the end — ”

“Margaret would never have been happy if she had lived; it was impossible. It was a blessing that she was taken; and the way she went was easy, Ethel, though it seemed so terrible.”

“Yes, and I think if she had lived perhaps Gerard would never have recovered; and — and — Vida, what are you thinking?”

Vida was looking off to the sky beyond the lake. The after-gray of sunset was deepening to the dark of night. The stars were coming out one by one.

"I'm thinking — of the infinite love of God," she answered. "We grope so blindly through the confusion of our own mistakes, and all the while God is untangling the snarl for each soul; and in the end we see that all things have worked together for good. Leave Margaret to God, Ethel; He knows, He knows and He loves her as well as any other child of His great, beautiful universe."

She took Ethel by the hand and crossed the piazza to where Winfred and Gerard were sitting.

The evening was redolent with the odor of pine-trees and perfume of flowers. The spirit of poetry breathed in the air. A little fluttering wind had sprung up, and among the tree-tops an answering rustle began to stir, and wavelets began to chase each other over the lake's surface and break in rippling cadence and soft swish upon the shore. The wild loneliness of the mountain-lake and forest was intensified by obscurity that blended the trees into black confused masses and cast weird vagueness over the darkening depths of the water. The oddly picturesque house, with its quaint wings and low hanging eaves, gathered mystery in the night-gloom. Here and there a light twinkled through a window, now and then a lantern flashed back and forth among the barns and outhouses. On the veranda, low seats were placed, and rugs and cushions were lying about. Vida sat down on one of the couches beside Winfred, and rested her head against his shoulder. Ethel took a low chair, and Gerard threw himself on some cushions at her feet. For a time they were all silent, enjoying the spirit of the scene and hour. Vida turned and smiled up at Winfred as he raised her hand and kissed it. Gerard rested his head against Ethel's knee, and she softly stroked his hair.

"I brought you a letter from Peggy," said Winfred. "Has she declined our invitation again?"

"No, she's accepted at last."

"She has! Then the child's actually returning to her senses!"

"I heard from Clyde too; he'll come. And there'll be Kate and Cousin Tom. We'll have a houseful for the Fourth."

"They've all accepted, that's good. Have any of you the least idea what's been the matter with Peggy?"

Vida and Ethel's eyes met, but nobody answered.

"Evidently none of you have. Of all unexpected, unreasonable whims, Peggy's have been the most incomprehensible. How often have we asked her here, Vida?"

"Six or seven times."

"It's most extraordinary. She's always been so precociously sensible about everything before."

"She's received the report of her entrance-examination for Smith's College," said Vida. "She must have passed brilliantly, though of course she tries to disguise it."

"What else does she say?"

"I'll show you her letter when we get in where there's a light. It's as interesting and original as usual, and sounds as though she were at least forty, particularly one part of it, — her intention regarding matrimony. She's given the subject a good deal of thought, and is quite positive she'll never marry. As she feels teaching is her vocation, she's going to make mathematics her specialty, and fit herself for a professorship in some college."

"How old is she?" asked Winfred; "I forget."

"Nearly eighteen."

"Possibly that mature decision may be reversed."

"If Peggy were like any other girl; but Peggy is n't." There was a note of sadness in Vida's words. It seemed odd that Winfred had never read this strange, stormy, self-contained young nature, and suspected Peggy's possible reason for declining their most urgent invitations. The first time after Vida's marriage that she had seen Peggy, the incredible change in the girl had amazed her. Though but a little over sixteen, the child

had been prematurely metamorphosed into a woman, with the settled expression usually only developed by years of experience and discipline.

"Poor little Peggy!" said Winfred. "Somehow I can't get rid of an absurd feeling of pathos in connection with her. What a friend she is — stanch as a chain cable, and brave as a young lioness! How she fought for me at the trial, and how she agonized over my defeat! I'm very, very glad she'll come."

"Is n't it time for you to have the decision from the Court of Appeals?" asked Gerard.

Winfred nodded.

"You must win. It is n't possible for such rank injustice to go through a third time."

"I'd have thought the whole situation impossible once."

There was not light enough to see the expression of Winfred's face; but Vida noticed that a constrained sound had come into his voice. He got up abruptly, and walked to the other side of the piazza. Vida's eyes followed him with a troubled look. Ethel saw the glance. She stooped and spoke to Gerard.

"I've been taken with a sudden desire to walk. Come down to the lake, it's so beautiful to-night."

"I was just thinking of asking you the same thing," answered Gerard.

Half-way down the piazza-steps, Ethel paused. "Vida," she said. "I forgot to tell you that while you and Winfred were out this afternoon a woman called, who seemed very much disappointed not to find you."

"Do you know who she was?"

"No, I don't remember ever having seen her before. She looked very forlorn, and acted queerly. She said she'd be back again."

"What's the matter with Winfred?" asked Gerard, as soon as he and Ethel were beyond hearing of the piazza.

"I don't know; but I thought Vida would like to be left alone with him. Poor fellow, no wonder he gets blue sometimes."

"He stands it magnificently. I hope to God it'll all come right soon."

They turned up the banks of the lake, and walked on in silence till they came to a tree whose great roots and rugged trunk formed a seat by the water's edge. They sat down, and in the stillness of the starlit night a subtle intensity seemed throbbing in the air. Over Ethel stole the sweet, strange shyness which no length of time or freedom of intercourse banishes from the woman's soul in the presence of a great, fervid love.

"Ethel," said Gerard, bending closer to her, "look up; I've something to ask you."

"I know," she said, and her arms stole about his neck, and she raised her eyes to his.

"When, dearest, when?"

"When you will, Gerard."

"I'd like our wedding to be here, if it pleases you too; here, where we've been so happy, where you've given me back my life."

"I'd rather it were here than any other place on earth."

"We've waited a long time; I had to be sure it was right to ask it of you; I mean I had to be sure of myself, sure I am well. Now a great impatience has come over me. Let it be next week; there's no reason for any more delay."

"We'll have the family with us; nobody else except Vida and Winfred."

"We'll write home to-morrow."

"Gerard, the past won't be a cloud upon your memory? It won't stand between you and the happiness I pray God to give you?"

"The memory of the past can't die, darling, and its sadness can't be changed; but I am very, very happy. It's a strange thing how men misread their own hearts. I did love Margaret; but it was n't with the deep soul-love of man for woman. I loved her as I might love some holy picture of a Madonna, some dream of sweet, tranquil saintliness. Love, as human hearts mean it, is a different thing. You are as true and worshipped a

saint to me as Margaret ; but you are more, you are a woman, you are my wife."

No calm, unresponsive acceptance of his caresses chilled the man's warm, living adoration. "Kiss me," he said, and her lips met his, trembling with the holy passion of a love as intense as his own. He drew her close to him. "You are part of my very soul," he said. "I often know your thought before you speak, as if it were my own. If I am away from you and you want me, I know that. How many times I've come back to ask what you wish ! I think clearer, truer ; I work better in the atmosphere of your mind than I possibly could apart from it. You give a completeness to my whole being ; and because it is so, even if you had never told me it, I'd know I must give the same completeness to yours. You bring all that is finest and best ; I can only add an infinitely lesser part ; but it is glorified and made worthy by your need of it."

"Always the same Gerard," she said, smiling at him, "putting everybody in a shrine except himself ! You are indeed my second self ; I believe I breathe the very breath of your life."

Then silence, solitude, and in it the rhythmic throb of two lives made one and indivisible, attuned by the mighty Master of soul harmonies to beat on in unison as long as they both shall endure !

CHAPTER XXXV.

JUST before sunset that evening a woman had started from the hamlet back in the mountains, and turned in the direction of the house on the lake. She stopped often and walked slowly, as though going perforce on some distasteful errand. The pallid hue of ill-health tinged her complexion, the worn lines of constant anxiety marked her face, with something of a new and more intense distress added. So slowly did she pursue her way that it was already dark before she came in sight of the house. She approached the front door, then drew back, and, making a wide circuit to avoid the notice of any one who might be about the place, walked to the side of the house bordering on the lake. Hearing voices from the veranda, she paused, and again drew further away, keeping out of sight under the trees. As her eyes became accustomed to the obscurity, she distinguished the four figures of the persons whose voices she had heard. After watching them for some minutes she moved forward to approach the veranda, hesitated, stopped, and returned again to her concealed point of observation. The words of the speakers she could not catch, but the murmur of their tones was still audible. At last she saw two of the persons rise and leave the others. Then she drew back still further into the shadows, as they neared her hiding-place, and passed close to her. She peered at them through the leaves of the bush that protected her. The result of the scrutiny seemed satisfying. Apparently she recognized Ethel, and apparently it was not Ethel of whom she had come in search.

Above, on the piazza, Winfred stood as Gerard and Ethel had left him, — staring down into the blackness of the water. Vida went to him, and slipped her hand into his. He turned, with

eyes lighting up for a second as they rested upon her, then darkening again under pressure of his thoughts.

"What is it, husband?"

He did not answer, only put his arm around her. She noticed that he closed his eyes in the compressed way that always showed they troubled him.

"They hurt you, dear?" she asked anxiously.

"Only a little."

"They're better, much better, are n't they, Winfred?"

"Much better," he assured her.

She nestled up to him, and spoke in the cooing way women sometimes do to the man they love, as if talking to a child.

"You've been so brave and patient! Perhaps it won't be long now before you can use them to work again."

"Perhaps," he said, trying to speak hopefully. He did not tell her that they pained him because, to test them, he had read five minutes that afternoon.

"You can sit in a moderate light now without a shade, and that's a great deal better."

"If they ever get so much better that I can write again —"

The inward groaning of his soul compelled him to pause.

"Great God, if they ever do!"

The passionate outburst came before he could suppress it; but he controlled himself at once.

"You've been happy, Winfred?" She asked it wistfully.

"Happy as a god — one way. You've given me the greatest happiness my life can possibly know. But, little girl, little wife, it is n't in human nature not to suffer when I'm held incapacitated and idle while every pulse in me is throbbing to work, work, work, to work for you, to use myself, to give out what is in me dying for mere lack of expression."

He could not keep the hopelessness out of his voice. She caressed him soothingly.

"It'll be all the grander for the long restraint. It is n't dying; it's gaining strength and beauty; and when you can express it, it will be a diviner thing than you ever conceived before."

In moments of extremity we clutch at any encouragement, and the words were some comfort to him.

"The doctors say I'll get well, and I think I shall; but it takes so long, it's so slow, so miserably slow! It's the waiting that tortures, — the endless waiting; while everything in me is burning, raging to *do*. I've got to work now for my right to exist among honest men."

"Winfred, you've heard something to-night, — something about the case?"

"It's all over," he said, and in spite of the apparent effort of self-control, his voice trembled and broke.

"You've got the decision?"

"I got it this evening."

"Dear, what is it?"

"The first one is sustained."

A low cry escaped her. "Winfred, it can't be true!"

"Oh, yes, it's true. The magnificent result of legal penetration and justice!"

"And this is the end? The case can't be tried again?"

"It's the end. See what I've brought you to! I was a damnable coward and villain to let you sacrifice yourself; and now it's too late to save you."

"Winfred, have I done anything to deserve that, or, after this year and a half together, are you incapable of understanding my love?"

He bowed his head under the rebuke, and her flash of wounded feeling faded away.

"I seem half crazy," he said. "It was the madman in me that spoke. Don't I know every beat of your heart, my wife?"

He took her in his arms, and held her, saying nothing more. She lay still a few seconds, then flung her own arms about his neck, and kissed him with a passion of devotion and pain.

"Winfred, Winfred, I love you so. I love you more to-night, now, than I ever loved you before; and from the very first I'd have suffered anything to spare you. My darling, my

own darling, if only it were I instead of you, if only it were — if I could take it from you.”

“Thank God, it is not you.”

The woman under the trees stepped once more out of the shadows, and very, very slowly drew nearer the house.

Winfred bent down his head to Vida's, and she kissed his eyes and stroked his face, speaking sweet words of help, and hope springing immortal from the lips of love. She folded her hands upon his breast, and looked up at him.

“We won't deceive ourselves, dearest; we realize all it means; it is terrible, but it won't crush you.”

The sweat broke out on his forehead. The blow had struck at the most sensitive spot of the *self* in him, still so extreme in its pride and will.

“It makes one believe in a rule of demons,” he cried. “To live under the injustice, the shame, for twenty, thirty, forty years, and with *no hope!* I've sins enough to pay for; but what have I done that my whole life should be ruined and my name coupled with infamy as long as it's remembered?”

“You've to prove that your life can't be ruined by anything outside yourself.”

“A man's honor is part of himself.”

“And no one can stain it except himself, not a thousand false convictions.”

“Yes, yes, not to his own consciousness; but my fellow-beings are something to me, they are to everybody. I could have borne anything, *anything* better than low, despicable dishonor. I never believed but that in the end I'd be vindicated.”

“Could you have borne better to have me die?”

“Hush,” he said, paling, as though the words might work a spell then and there, taking him at his rash assertion on the spot.

“Could you bear better to lose the new, sweet life that is coming to us, your child, Winfred, and mine?”

He pressed her head to his breast, and bent till his lips rested on her hair.

"No, no, no, darling, but, poor little thing, from the very hour of its birth our baby will have to carry the burden of a disgraced name. Your child, the sweet little soul that only purity and love should touch!"

So intense was his suffering that it wrung scalding tears from his eyes.

"It will have all that and something more, something that will make it one of the most blessed of children ever sent down to earth, — the influence of a father so strong and great he can endure the worst unshaken." Again she locked her arms about his neck.

"Oh, my wife, shall I ever in all my rebellious, selfish existence grow worthy of you? I thought a few rays of light had flashed upon my soul, I had won a little truer strength, a little nobler patience. At the first great strain the old devil is in arms and I'm beaten again. Vida, Vida, my lesson is being taught in the hardest school that could be found for me. I've felt my own power so much! I've gloried in my own strength; I, the creature, have taken credit to myself which belongs to my Creator. I must return it where it is due. Pride! What have we, ignorant, helpless puppets in the hands of Omnipotence, to do with pride? It's the most ludicrous of all man's insane pretensions."

"It's something to know it's so."

"Perhaps I'm learning the lesson — a little. I can at least understand better when I stop to think. Then I see myself stripped of the stage-trappings I've decked myself in; and the spectacle is n't alluring. I get a humiliating picture of my own maudlin weakness and presumption. And yet — *you love me!*"

"The man I love is not weak, and he showed me the truth and the greatness of life; he changed me from a senseless, useless doll into a woman."

"Never a doll. They had stifled the woman into unconsciousness, that was all. Perhaps I did show her the way to freedom, but I was only able to teach her the little I had learned with my head. Vida, *you* have led *me* into that high world

which only the soul can find. If for a short time I was the stumbling guide, you soon passed on far ahead, to become and remain forever my leader through God's infinite realms of light. It's the woman's spirit that sees; the man's faltering footsteps only follow after."

He sat down on one of the couches, and drew her beside him. The woman stood at the foot of the piazza-steps, but they did not notice her.

"If the doctors are wrong, my own belief wrong, and I don't get well? Then my part must be a silent one. I must live back out of sight, not able to utter a word in disproof of my own degradation, simply learning to submit, — a difficult accomplishment, and to mortal sense, not a very useful one in the march of the world's affairs. It seems as though the active part must be more profitable to one's kind than the passive."

"Suppose you are being trained for a higher and greater activity than you're capable of now, with all your power of intellect and character?"

"My intellect and character thank you for your handsome recognition," he said with a forced laugh. "The plans of Omniscience can have no flaws. The world will advance no less because one man's few books and plays may have to remain unwritten. It's only the self, the supreme self, that thinks the matter of much importance, that clamors to be let make the books and plays, like a child whining to mix mud pies. If I'm to be developed," he smiled a not very successful smile, "by learning gracefully to do nothing, it must be all right; but it seems sometimes as if my ability in that line were being a little overtaxed."

"Doing nothing? And that boy you saved from suicide and made a man of, — was that nothing? Is it nothing to be an inspiration to every youth in the village down there and the whole country about? Nothing to rouse their crude, inert minds, and stir them to make the most and best of themselves? Is it nothing to fit yourself by brave, hopeful endurance to be the true guide and high counsellor of our child?"

"It's something to try ; to achieve it really, if I ever can, — well, I suppose it will be greater and finer than anything my ambition ever suggested and ever could lead to. He that conquereth himself is greater than he that taketh a city. But the natural man surrenders hard."

"Is it nothing, Winfred, to have made earth a heaven to me?"

"It is everything, if I have done it." The sadness in his face changed to a look of more patient calm. "You are right, Vida, I have gained something, and it's worth all it's cost. I could n't have gained it any other way. In my sane moments I see it perfectly. I needed all I've suffered. There are some truths of the soul we don't learn through joy. They're beginning to come to me. Happiness lies deeper than any cravings of self can reach, — it belongs to a life in whose grandeur and beauty self becomes lost. There's a soul-development that only commences with the death-agony of self. We groan and struggle ignorantly against an inner force pushing us on to a self-surrender which, when it's accomplished, will link us with Infinity. It is you, my wife, who have made me understand the mystery of my awful discipline, and you've helped me bear it as I never could have borne it alone."

Vida looked at him with an emotion that made words impossible. He met her eyes, and read in them all that lay too deep to be spoken. And each felt, perhaps as never before, how close was the welding that joined their souls, and how all sense of duality had been lost in the oneness of a union so complete that neither could say, "here it begins," or "here it ends." Its circle seemed perfect, and its life eternal. In the silence that followed Winfred's last words, a woman's hesitating tones made them start. The woman was standing half-way up the piazza-steps.

"Excuse me, if you please — are — are you Mrs. Grey? Are you — Mr. — Grey?"

"Yes," said Vida, "come up, come up. What do you want? What can we do for you?"

The woman, falteringly, did Vida's bidding, but made no answer to her questions.

"Sit down," said Vida, and Winfred drew forward a chair, into which the woman sank.

"You were here once already to-day, were n't you?" asked Vida.

"Yes."

"You can't belong to the neighborhood; I've never seen you before. Do you come from the village below?"

"No."

"She's evidently in great trouble," said Winfred; then he turned to the woman, "If you'll tell us what it is, we'll help you if we can."

The woman looked up at him as a hounded dog might do, then dropped her head in her hands, and burst into wild, hysterical sobs. For some moments all attempts to quiet her were utterly useless, then, by a supreme effort of her own, she gained control of herself, straightened up and, a stony expression hardening her face, she turned to Winfred.

"Richard Paton died four days ago. I am his wife."

The surprise caused by the abrupt announcement made both Winfred and Vida draw back from the woman.

"He'd been ill for a long while, — a year, two years; I can't fix it exactly. I did n't know what was the matter with him; he just wasted, and got thinner and worse looking all the time. It was his mind preying on his body; but I did n't know till after." Now that she had begun, she spoke in a dry, forced voice, without pause or break, as though she had finally nerved herself for the ordeal, and were going through it mechanically. "A few days before he died he gave me a piece of business to attend to after he'd gone. He wished me to find you," — she looked at Winfred, — "not to write, but to come myself as soon as possible, and tell you he had made a full confession of the wrong he did you. He told me the whole thing then — I never knew it before, so help me God!" There was a second's flare of heartbroken

passion in her manner and tone; then she went on dryly as before. "He made me write it down word for word as he spoke it; and when it was done he signed it, and made me sign it too. It's here; I've brought it with me."

She put her hand in her pocket, and drew forth an envelope which she held out to Winfred.

Speech is stilled at the sublime sight of a storm-hidden sun bursting gorgeously through black, scattering clouds. The flaming of joy through the vanishing shadows of a soul's probation stays all human forms of utterance. The smile of the Almighty is in the radiance of that sunburst. The vibrating throb of divine love is the key-note of that ecstasy.

Under the world-revealing sky of night the husband and wife stood alone. Tears of inarticulate gratitude stood in the man's eyes, and fell silently from hers. She drew close to him, and felt the strong beat of his heart as his arms pressed her against it, felt its pulses quicken while his lips sought hers with the passion that had never waned nor wavered because its life was in his soul. Her whole being thrilled with gladness under his kisses, and his child beneath her heart garnered up the torrent of love that flowed over and around and through it, while the night-hush deepened, and the angels of God drew near and breathed forth peace and great joy.

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